Stan Brakhage

The Brakhage Lectures

Georges Méliès

David Wark Griffith

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VICTORIAN COLLEGE OF THE ARTS

For Jane

The GoodLion

Chicago Illinois USA

Stan Brakhage

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Foreword

Vision, whether it be spoken of as 20/20 or as second sight, is primary to our lives. Being primates, we depend on its function more than we do upon that of any other of our senses. Men exceptionally gifted with its possibility, with *sights* surpassing those of usual insight, we honor as seers.

Film makers—those who make the *sun play,* in Griffith's words—have had a paradoxically awkward acceptance as artists among us. Very possibly it is an aspect of that threat which Brakhage speaks of at the beginning of his first lecture: "the search for an art . . . . either in the making or the appreciation . . . . is the most terrifying adventure imaginable . . ." In the situation of an art so newly discovered, all of its possibilities are vulnerable to an instant perversion insofar as there can be no manifest tradition to protect them. The value of "movies" in our own world has been dominated by their appeal to a mass audience and thus their ability to make money. After D. W. Griffith's investors had forced him to edit *The Birth of a Nation,* crippling its truth, he himself financed the making of *Intolerance,* Hollywood's "greatest commercial failure . . ." In short, the world such men live in tends to reject them insofar as they insist upon the art of *making things visible,* which that world has learned to ignore.

Put simply, it might be said that we see things in two insistent places, outside and in. When there is a conjunction, when the *out there* becomes inexplicably *within* us, a true revelation occurs. We have lived to see images of our own kind stepping out of strange metallic containments onto the moon's surface, and yet no change in our sight seems to have happened. In contrast, Méliès' crude fabrications far previous to their literal possibility get us there, or rather bring that wonder to us, through the eye into the mind. Again simply, it may be that no reality of the physical world can take place in human experience without a specific imagination of that reality in the human itself.

Griffith's trust in "Accident," as Brakhage puts it, the fact that Méliès sees as "magic" what Pathé intends to be used for "document," the flickering transformations that turning the pages of a children's picture book must have meant to Eisenstein, the instant clarity with which Dreyer recognized *his* Joan of Arc, all of these circumstances describe men given to some unremitting use of

themselves, possessed by it and possessive in their insistent demand for it, *artists* who, like Indians, eat the bear's heart not to fill their bellies merely but to take that power into themselves. There is an authority in all they do, an authenticity, in that they have only appetite to see what they know *can* be seen. What others see, or tell them they see, must of necessity wait. Their vision is primary. Their size, humanly, is to be measured by the magnitude of physical world they work to realize, to bring to eye's witness, in a dream peculiarly their own.

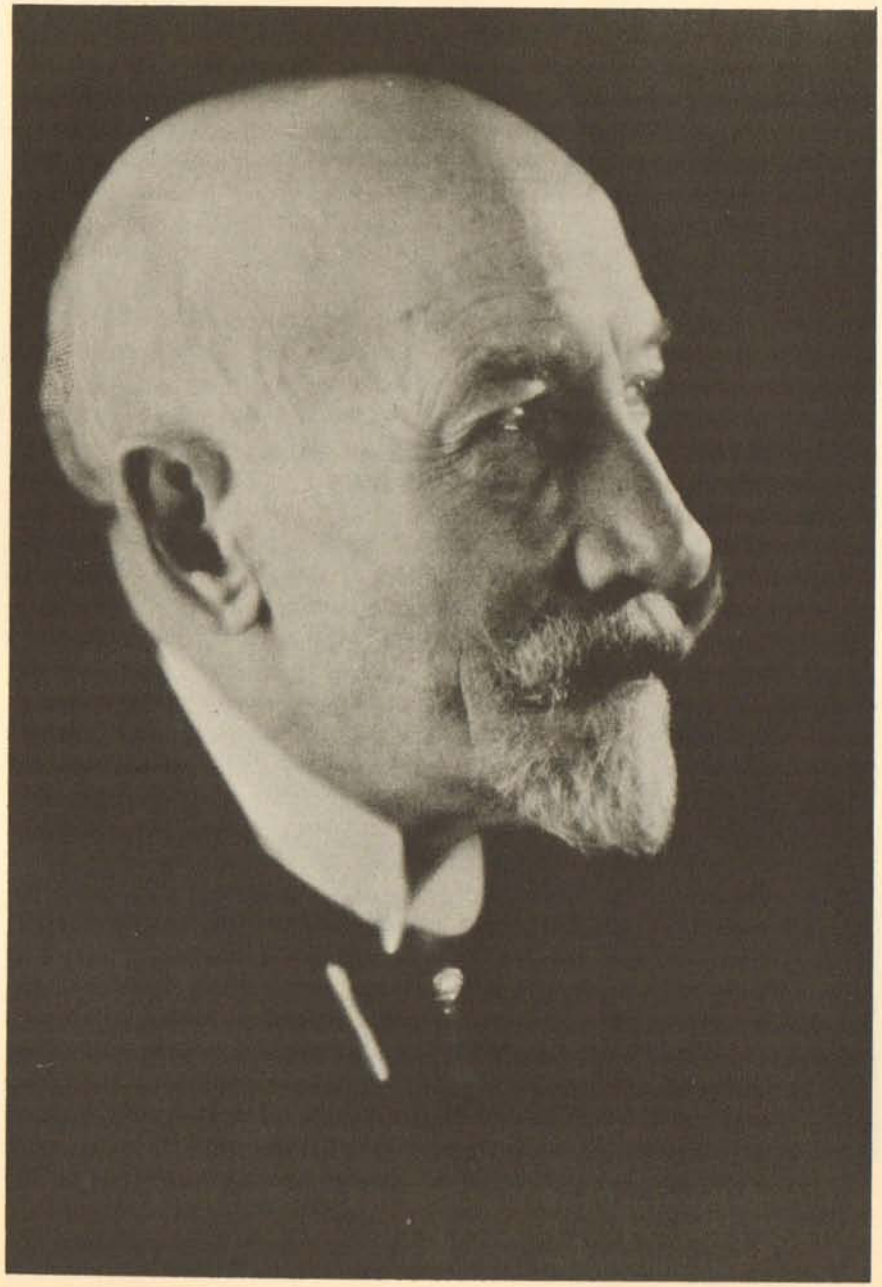
It takes a man of like possession and gift to honor them, someone whose own patience and commitment have brought him many times to these specific places of isolation and wonder, where the light enters the dark to see and to be seen. This book is his witness.

ROBERT CREELEY
Bolinas, California

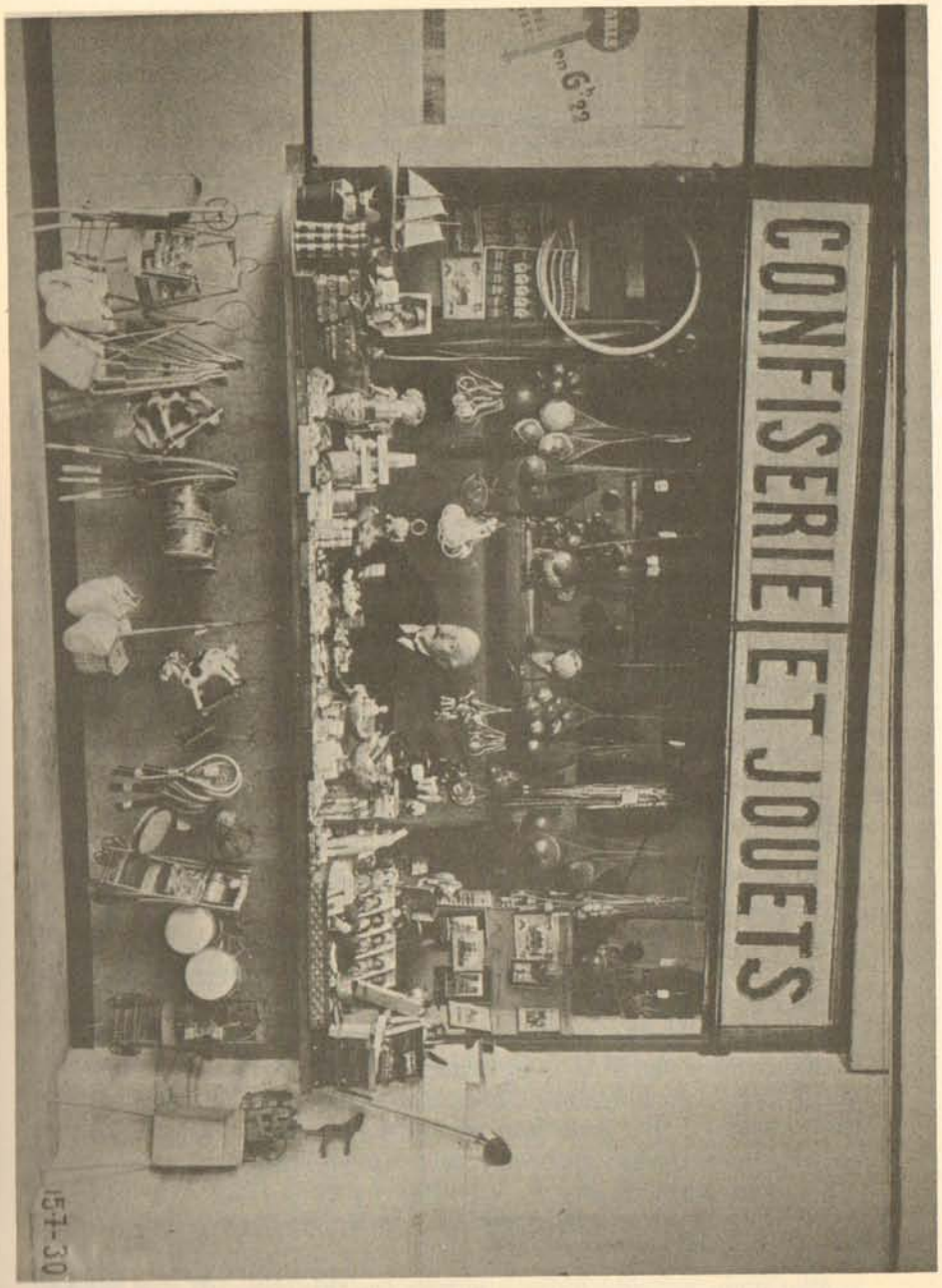
Georges Méliès

M. Georges Méliès

The real Houdini in *Décapite Recalcitrant,* directed by Méliès



In late life



George in 'the' candy store

Now let me say it to you—simply as I can: the search for an art . . . . either in the making or the appreciation . . . . is the most terrifying adventure imaginable: it is a search *always* into unexplored regions; and it threats the *soul* with terrible death at every turn; and it exhausts the mind utterly; and it leaves the body moving, moving endlessly through increasingly unfamiliar terrain: there is NO hope of return from the territory discovered by this adventuring; and there is NO hope of rescue from the impasse where such a search may leave one stranded.

It is not without cause that parents shudder when a child of theirs expresses the wish to become an Artist: they will, of course, do everything in their power to protect the child from such a fate!: they will even send him to institutes which will create phony arts and phony art appreciation to distract him . . . . just as they will send the young explorer to the safe jungles of Disneyland—or those of the TV movie, etc.—to undermine any real adventuring: the society will, in fact, distort the whole meaning of the word "appreciation" . . . . confusing it with "voyeurism" . . . . to tame the energies of any active involvement: for real aesthetic appreciation runs exactly the same hazards as art-creation—leads as surely to what society calls "madness" as any creative making: (you may find this hard to believe, but only because we have less example of real attendance to art in our culture than of creativity . . . . thus an even phonier idea of "audience" than of "artist" . . . . an ideology of many millions who imagine they appreciate—who are as silly in such imagination as would be a drunken group of mountain climbers scaling the papier-maché rock sets on the back-lot of a Hollywood studio.)

If you accept the full adventure of this course, you will surely lose your mortal soul!: you will be tortured by demons (physically pained by them, tickled to death by them, mentally-anguished to the point of suicidal thought): you will be stretched to the orders of angels more terrible than demonic force, set tasks by them beyond all comprehension or imaginable accomplishment: you will be changed so that your mother will never recognize you, so that your father will disown you, your friends betray you, your loved-one live in terror of you . . . . :

. . . . but then all these things will happen anyway—so what have you to lose? . . . .

You have nothing to gain either: for this, like all real adventures, is purposeless—IE: . . . . its impulse is beyond any purposeful definition—its achievements are cosmic . . . . comic, if you like that term better . . . . but anyway, of no *reason*able order: (it is fashionable for art adventurers these days to say they are after knowledge or fun or escape even: but these terms are sheerly as symbolic a claim as the term 'gold' was for centuries of explorers): . . . . "for the hell of it" will do as explanation as well as any other: for 'hell' comes first, just as in Dante's adventure: and most do, alas, get stuck there beyond rescue—: hell comes first in all sequence . . . . (imagine Dante entering first what he called heaven . . . . : would it not, in that order, have been hellish?): and most have always got stuck early in whatever endeavor or non-endeavor: be advised then, that if you fall behind, no one will wait for you; but no one will wait for you if you move ahead either, nor where-nor-howsomever you wander: any true sense of company will occur as rarely as Maxwell's Demon: the demons of art will make you *know* this, your desperate loneliness—they will make you know this and all truth by telling you lies: . . . . ("He who seeks the truth must, as far as possible, doubt everything," as Descartes put it): you will wander in hallways of real objects looking as if they were mirrored.

If this all sounds like 19th century rhetoric—be advised that it IS of the orders of 19th century rhetoric . . . . : I am introducing George Méliès, and thus the 19th century beginning of motion picture art.

Let me then present a fictional biography of Méliès—an historical novel so to speak—whereat I, as demonstrator, lie to you . . . . tell a tale, as it's called . . . . in order to get at the truth. My story of course is based on facts: however a fact about unexplored territory cannot be anything but misleading. I present, therefore, a fiction that is IN fact: if you follow, we begin advent—adventuring . . . . touring the interior of a den of light, a cave of white darkness, shadow splotched with the dappled movements of illuminating black, a four-squared corridor widening from its entrance into this room—the gate of that projector—to an 'impossible' chamber (of the imagination) . . . . the flat 'cube' of the screen . . . . and branching out to become that complex of tunnels best referred to as The Labyrinth, each terminus of which, in the spirals of the spin-of-light behind every pair of eyes—every single eye-gate—in this room, in the gray hills and valleys of each brain present, holds a (thus) many-headed host of terrible monsters . . . . The Hydra, considered as a singularity which we all (therefore) somehow share amidst a tangle of dangerous angel hair—that electrical thought-glass which cuts instinctual nerve to pieces ("doth make cowards of us all" inheriting Hamlet's problem) in this the most forbidding, and utterly foreign, land shape of all.

Young George then—already defeated by some-such creatures as we can begin to imagine on the barren planet of his foetal mind . . . . completely overwhelmed, torn to pieces before what-we-would-call his 'birth'—begins as a child to invent a spirit-of-himself which will revenge him . . . . a hero who will FREE the wickedly enchanted—or otherwise destroyed—pieces of his actual

being, cause the monsters to dis-gorge the parts of his actuality; and young George, perhaps later then, begins to imagine a heroine who will restore him, a woman who will sew together or otherwise re-member his actual being: but he cannot quite imagine the woman as loving him, once remembered, rather than the hero of his invention—cannot imagine her as anything other than heroine (to go with the hero) and/or Mother of him-George . . . . cannot visualize her as other than spirit-force (unless she be Mother-again—wherein he be dismembered as once before). George finds his first hopeful solution to this dilemma at a magic show whereat impossible things happen and all contradictions therefore resolve in the hands of the able magician.

George himself decides to become just such a magician; but first he must make the hero of his invention a magician. As he is *imagining* the woman (rather than inventing her) she will always be victim of this magic—subject to the transformations of it: thus young George hopes to have power over her equal to her necessary ability to re-member and, as Mother then, to re-store him. He must also manage some ultimate magic for his actual being which can defeat the magic he gives the hero-of-his-invention; and he begins, therefore, to create a demon-self (of himself-imagined-restored) who can tear his hero to pieces as he foetally once was; and he must of course in all this desperate plotting manage to conceal all knowledge of the demonic invention from the heroic invention until the proper time (when he is all-of-a-piece) to spring his monster-self from ambush upon his hero. He must, additionally, conceal his 'dark-side' as it's called from imaginings of the heroine, because it is necessary she love the hero up-to-a-point . . . . (IE: until she has fulfilled her remembrance of actual him—a very tricky matter because demonic-George must end up as part-and-parcel with foetal-George re-membered: otherwise George will simply have invented another monster to turn on him once his rescuing hero has been defeated: and the woman in his imaginings *must* thus be very stupid and therefore easily tricked in the midst of her greatest magic—or else . . . . as George thinks better . . . . she must be too purely good, too utterly filled with 'sweetness and light' to even recognize the bitter black monstrousness of the dark-side of her own sewing; and, even later then—at hero's death—she must be too naive to recognize the evil parcel as being of the parts of actual George-restored.)

Hyenas laugh rather than growl—humans, too . . . . : and George soon discovers humor (that term almost synonymous, soundwise, with human . . . . and meaning, in exact English sound-synonym, to trick madness—IE: "to humour him") . . . . humor as powerful magic of duplicity . . . . humor, that traditional field of endeavor whereby one elicits bared teeth in the form of a smile which appears opposite of that vicious threat it thus conceals—reveals deadly fangs even, the broader it spreads to say, say, 'friend' . . . . breaks into the "foe's" bark of "friendly" laughter as it reaches the height of duplicity: and young George decides to master this powerful magic to most perfectly conceal his dreadful intentions, so that he can perform all his other tricks in the contradictory milieu of elicited snarls, growls, barks, and general roaring laughter of his utterly 'fooled' audience.

There is an historical reason George must master the trick of humor before all other magics: he was born in France, amid 19th-century scepticism: audiences were no longer incredulous about magic: the day of the serious shaman was long past (for that present at least): and even the progressive magic of Science (IE:—that craftsmanship of technical witchery . . . . mechanical alchemy . . . . which awed a previous generation) was becoming suspect as a closed, and completely explicable, system: the late 19th century magician either laughed with the audience, conditioning thus its laughter, or was laughed off the stage: audiences were no longer subject to the traditional 'enchantment' . . . . were no longer seriously 'charmed.'

George discovered that essential madness of the 19th century that needed to be "humoured" when he was in his 'teens—at a time when his own incredulity was breaking under the weight of accumulated knowledge: and, by this time, he was managing to conceal his heroic and demonic inventions from any knowledge his parts had of each other, and to exclude both from any imaginings of woman; and it was, too, at this 'teen-time he began surely studying that master stage magician of all time: the great Houdini (*not* to be confused with his American imitator half-a-century later)—Houdini, the man who embodied the fullest traditional development of this centuries-old, specifically European, form of shamanism-as-entertainment . . . . the man who does now represent the culmination of that form of magic—whose name is synonymous with it.

George began to study this tradition because he felt the need to *prove* the magic he'd endowed his hero with in public—and ultimately to stage the triumph of his hero over primal monsters before an audience . . . . thus to exteriorize the battle which his foetal-self had lost on interior grounds. What he did not at first realize was that only monsters of his own making would ever appear under his staged direction: like the shaman with his "rain dance," George hoped his mock battles would precipitate the "real" one, and that it would follow the orders of his repeated invention—that his mechanical manipulations, his tricks, would transform into the orders of phenomenal magic when the actual combat began . . . . and all in the secure surrounds of attendant company/audience.

All the stories of his childhood, all myths, and most so-called "fantasy" books since, had informed him that he was not alone in having the dreadful experience of foetal dismemberment: these tales constituted a history of the various partial successes and the ultimate failure—so far—in human confrontation, with the seemingly endless host of monsters on that alien plain (as it was usually pictured in paintings) with that distant mountain range, marking horizon, wherefrom three shadows moving toward him had presaged the primal destructive assault . . . . and that craggy valley (a specialty of Medieval 'oils') where his captive being was tortured . . . . and that cave where he was torn to pieces—: all these images he shared, in their various forms, with many other men who had created heroes to return there for their deliverance . . . . or had made maps, like vast battle plans, of the foreign territory—portraits like "wanted" posters of the demons to be slain—"rain dances" of language and oil paint in terrified sympathetic magic hopefully predicting the success of the hero.

And George, raised in the Christian tradition, could not help but also think that if *once* one man's hero could take upon himself these demons of 'The World,' that then they would cease to exist in their various but clearly-related forms for all men—could not help but think of each member of the audience as also a symbol of the disembodied fragments of this horrible drama, which—could it ever be made to surface—would be recognized by each, each lending his hero to the necessary battle.

George did not consciously think all this out as he began his career as a stage magician because his further aim (of attaining some whole being again) necessitated the concealment of one part of his invented nature from another.

Because both inventions had to be concealed from the woman of his imaginings, sex was *only* conceivable to him (as most young men of his time) as an absoluted private act, clouded in the utmost secrecy, fortified from any interference with his plans by every means of possession possible . . . . simplified by money ('buyable,' in other words), guarded by jealousies of romantic love (most effective when engendered in the woman) and finally insured (as it *were*) by the absolute sanctification of marriage.

But these protective measures of sexual approach operative in the society around him, and the vulgar humor so desperately clouding all public reference to the private act, failed to give George any sense of integral security. His early relationships with actual girls naturally shattered his imaginings: the societal blows dealt to his complex image of woman destroyed most of his careful make-up of her, leaving only a series of bell-shaped curves reverberating in a blur of echoing multiplicity—many women of doll-like features and proportions all looking and moving alike . . . . the chorus line. This Bell Woman, as we'll call her, could

be publicly sexual because she was only a series of residual ghosts of some destroyed original; and as such she seemed a perfect partner for the dismembered man. Her enticing movements were safely synchronized to patterns of well-known music, all individuation limited to the bell dance, and the whole reverberation of her enmeshed in the trappings of the stage. Attention to her could contract mid-dance to focus thrillingly upon the centered image of the lead dancer, or star, because this individuation was only a pale reminder of any integral original and was always backed by the chorus-line scheduled, in the dance, to shatter into echoes of her. Often the right and left of this line of blurs divided into antithetical movements, just as a bell's visual vibrations might vary to either side of some struck center: legs could kick in clear approximate of sex dance on the stage because there was no cunt to fuck in all this ghostly mass: the imagined necessary power of the Bell Woman was 'number' rather than any frighteningly indivisible magic; her make-up had to be doll-like—a *reductio ad absurdum* of individual feature—; and her milieu was, natch, gaity . . . . a humoresque to mask the horror of this recreation or re-enactment of the destruction of woman.

But George, a very precise man, wasn't satisfied with this blur of a woman: he cross-bred her show-biz dress with the costume of a ballerina—opting for some reminder, in this complex, of Tchaikovskian tragedy . . . . the sad swan woman, mystery-woman, tragic heroine—albeit alive and kicking. Finally, he singled her out (usually in ballet tights and that blur of hips such fluff of swan's dress engenders) for a most particular transformation of his own devising: he imagined her multiplicity in the sense that she could be turned into anything—as a variety of being rather than a number of images of being . . . . a transformation in quality rather than quantity—himself, The Magician, controlling the various charms of this *femme fatale.* He limited her in his imagination to the tradition of stage magic: she was always thus, the "helper" of The Magician: and otherwise, he drew upon the whole mythic history of woman, from oracle of Delphi to mermaid, from goddess to witch. In her divine aspects he had the courage to give her power over men—to loose demons against them . . . . to turn men into beasts, etc.: but she was always putty in the hands of The Magician—or almost always—and could be made to jump through hoops like circus dogs, vanish in a puff of smoke at The Magician's slightest annoyance: she could be made-up out of anything . . . . a dress-maker's dummy . . . . the hoop she'd jump through . . . . thin air itself. But whatever George's control over her, she was a magnificent imagining—greater than if she were just George's creation—inasmuch as she had a divine aspect which George adored and was certainly, in all her aspects, essentially "an original:" and, as such, we will call her "George's Love."

The 19th century magic showman had to be a mechanical genius, and George Méliès was no exception to this rule: the hero of his invention—that spirit-of-him created to wreack vengeance upon the demons who had destroyed his actual self before birth—that hero then, came to take on aspects of The Golem . . . . a kind of stone impassivity and a manner of implacable servitude—the aloof presence and politesse of the stage magician, moving with rhythmic grace and machine precision through his acts and bowing to the audience he has just amazed . . . . the audience he leads into the maze of awesome improbability—or taking upon himself the laughter of that audience he has just amused . . . . the audience whose madness he had 'humoured' by making his hero-self appear as buffoon before them. George struggled many years preparing for the dreadful eventuality of his revenge and possible salvation: and all this time the hero took the gadgets and machines of magician's trade as extensions and, finally, appendages of self . . . . as knights must once have taken their swords, lances, horses. George built his own sets, gaining maximum control of the synthetic *mise en scène* which would one day (through sympathetic magic) precipitate the land shapes of original terror (the plain, the valley, the cave); and he designed all costume to wrap each moving creature in recognizable form (the oldest shamanism in the book); and he choreographed all movements to make (for the "rain dance") a puppet-master's perfect manipulability of the entire stage . . . .

And he failed . . . .

He achieved a worldly fame which was of no use to his desperate purpose, and wealth which couldn't bribe demons, and he won The Bell Woman in her endlessly repeating variations of being (no vibration of which offered the least hope of heroine splendor or resolution for his dismembered self).

He failed as miserably as ever a man could . . . . inasmuch as he had never even approached the 'darkling plain' of his dismemberment again—had made a charade instead to stand for it—a distraction repeated nightly with mocking success before an endlessly howling and applauding audience of horrible heads and hands floating in a black pit beyond the illuminated space of his actual shame.

Were it not for the machine, George would probably have played-out this hopeless game for the rest of his life: but the signs of the times were kind to George and directed him beyond his own advertence, led him (in midst of his inner despair) down the most natural path of his daily existence—to the doorway of friendship with a man (symbolically?) named Pathé. It would have been difficult for George (as famous 19th century Parisian magician) *NOT* to have known the French inventor Pathé: and (as we know now how difficult it would have been for George to be *anything but* a 19th century magician) we can begin to say he had a *destiny* . . . . that these two men were destined to meet . . . . that the signs of the times—The Fates—perhaps advertised them to each other in such a milieu of practicality as to insure their friendship: (how happily extricable are these Fates once one understands the simple daily warps and woofs of all their weaving). Anyway, George was one day invited to the home of his friend Pathé to view a new invention.

The inventor dimmed all light and then cast a single beam of illumination across the room to etch the black and white image of a beach and ocean against the wall. George was not surprised; he had seen 'transparencies' before. Such 'shadow images' were, in fact, centuries old: and photographs had been available since George's birth. But then, suddenly, the waves of the ocean began to move in toward the beach—to splash upon them . . . . a brilliant rash of white light along a line of gray texture: had Venus herself emerged from this sea, been born in that room then, George couldn't have been more excited than he was by this moving picture; for he must have immediately known this machine as a means for the Venus-birth of his own being, known it as a means of infinite transformation, known it as his Love.

His first move, in keeping with his character, was to attempt to buy it: but Pathé would have none of that—said this invention was for scientific research . . . . not, no! not ever to be used for entertainment. George's next action, in keep with his whole story of indomitable will, was to go home and invent it himself. Mercurially (after god of both thieves and artists) he both stole and created the Venus machine: like Prometheus he brought this god-force to 'the people'—its firing light (on-off illumination of individual still images in sequence giving the illusion of movement) lit up his magician's stage and dazzled his audiences.

But George, who knew these images were *not* moving pictures—knew them as 'stills' he'd photographed in a sequence of move-mirages—was no more dazed by this machine's performance than by any of the other tricks of his creation . . . . and thus he, alone of all those in attendance, first sensed something very strange occurring at each projectioning—something no one else in the entire world was to recognize consciously for twenty-some years: an eerie feeling . . . . a rising of hair on the back of his neck . . . . an indefinable fright to his whole nervous system—though not anything he could put his mechanic's finger upon—nothing logically explicable—caused him increasing apprehension each time the flickering beam of light cut across his workshop room or flared over the sea of hands and faces in the darkened auditorium: it was as if some being he *hadn't* photographed was attempting to "steal the show," to usurp the screen and "upstage" all the pictured theatricality of his devising . . . . by some ephemeral yet "real" act

unchoreographed—or simply by the power of "presence" (that indefinable quality some actors have which makes it impossible to cast them as anything but "star.")

George often faced the projector from his position on the stage, saw the beam of widening illumination as a hallway he might almost climb, diminishing in size until he'd perhaps vanished into the tunnel of the lens: he knew from experience that any step into the light would tear his shadow off his back and hurl it against the screen behind; and so at first he avoided bodily intruding upon the apparitions of this machine. But his thoughts entered the flickering corridor and dissolved in hypnotized 'light-mares' as they encountered some alien quality moving there, creeping steadily down the temporal ladders of off-on illumining, gathering fearfully in the dark pockets of all pictured forms. It began to seem to him as if some forbidden veil were being ripped open in each shift of light . . . . slowly, steadily, rent by black's every insistence. The screen behind him smoked and darkened in formal patches as if the focused ray were turning it to carbon; and yet the screen seemed to repair itself continually, for these carboniferous patches shifted feverishly across the flat surface: were they smoke-hold of some hellfire, then, that burns eternally without ever consuming? No!, rather—George sensed—this fire of motion pictures erupts out of Time's dimension . . . . and burns through an infinite number of screens, or veils—films, then—beyond human comprehension.

Thus George became the first man to recognize motion pictures as medium of both super-nature and under-world—and instrument for unveiling the natural through reflection . . . . and also the gateway for an alien world underneath the surface of our natural visual ability—an underworld that erupts into "ours" through every machine which makes visible to us what we cannot naturally sense. The so-called supernatural IS—as any magician knows—innately tangible to the naked eye . . . . its recognition-as-nature requiring only a shift of thought—a sleight of hand: but the underworld HAD to be in-vented, as it were . . . . IE: its very real existence had to be passed-thru invention for "us" to begin to be both aware *of* it and prey *to* its consummation.

In these recognitions George inherited the full destiny he'd been born-to before his physical birth. The instant he found his medium . . . . a medium that could summon-up the unborn . . . . the only medium which can exteriorize moving imagination—in that instant George's life was all *before* him: he became the artist he had always been—the first such in modern history to turn 'a medium' into 'an art:' he had his demons lured from under and trapped into a realm of super sense: all the monster creatures which the mechanical thought of his unborn self had loosed upon him were loosed again through the terrible machine of motion pictures: and the long awaited battle could begin.

Knowing the black areas of the ignited screen to be the most actually haunted, George created many of his ghostly photo-apparitions in white—overexposing the image even, and blurring his spectral forms by shaking the camera . . . . creating a counter-balancing demonology—an army of super-impositions upon all shadow. Black costume demons of his design tended, in his photo-play, to be easily defeated . . . . exploded, usually, in a puff of brilliant white smoke.

The hero of these movie dramas was usually himself-as-photographed, garbed in enough black—the tux of the showman—to permit his photo-form to move magically through the darkling planes of any composition . . . . carrying, as if it were a standard, his recognizable features for a head as hero's helmet—and yet sometimes disguised by the beard of an old man's role he'd created for his hero self—and almost always in that aged form disguised as a 'fool,' 'buffoon,' or one utterly prey to, at least, costume-demons in a play of foolishness . . . . as if George were offering devils or baiting *The* Devil with his elder self (some trap, perhaps, borrowed from Goethe's *Faust* with its humanly happy ending). Certainly George borrowed the trappings of all western man's converse with demons in a fight of fire with fire—white fire with black fire.

But because any actual monstrousness seemed to George to inhabit every area of graphic form—every shade of line that made image recognizable—his war spread naturally against every being and object photographed . . . . the only safety of his hero-self being his ability to transform one thing into another—especially into some mass of white . . . . the only heroic weapon, then, the magic wand: and George's ultimate means of helping his heroic self was his ability to transform the whole structure of the battlefield at any instant the 'going' got too rough. It was this latter necessity which led him to make the first splice in motion picture history—the attaching of one piece of celluoid sequence of "stills" to another.

The very nature of the war, however, began to change in the middle of George's career as film-maker. If every graphic of recognizable form was 'haven' for demons, then photo-still objects became enemy's fort. Every unmoving *thing* was, after all, a deteriorating thing. And if it had lines and shading upon it (nestling dark forces), it quickly became haunted: even the image of the sun—main source of light—required only the lines of a 'face' upon it to make it at enmity with anything more purely white. The moon, almost synonym for movie screen, haunted George particularly because its representation demanded a 'face' . . . . thus led George to some cosmic suspicion of every light in the sky: were

not all stars—as the first astro-watchers had seen them— simply high-lights vaguely indicating the shapes of enormous black creatures? Because George felt all photo-still objects as demon fortresses, he was moved as film-maker to keep everything as animated as possible (like a man stuffing old houses with as much life as he could to edge out ghosts)—certainly to keep all people-shapes in continual movement in opposition to any 'set' of their surroundings . . . . "on his side," so to speak. He was also determined to give inanimate objects their 'faces' . . . . like warning signs of what they harbored . . . . and then often to animate those faces. He was inspired like the Greeks before him to "fill in" the spaces between stars—with as much white as possible.

All Renaissance shading, giving the illusion of depth, also provided 'cover' for his enemies: thus George was obsessed to attack the whole of western painterly trappings—Renaissance perspective itself: he therefore began to conceive his movie scenes as a series of movable 'flats,' offering a minimal 'vanishing point' and maximal relationship to the screen against which they would be projected. This desparate measure, against the grain of western visual development, gave George a new battleground (the likes of which had not been seen since the aesthetics of Florence had won over those of Siena). The nature of the battle became *anamorphic* (rather than *mythic*): the moving against the immovable: the quick against the dead. Just as he *knew* the moon must have a face (more dreadful to imagine in "the dark of the moon" than when clearly etched on white) so, too, he knew all white must have its black lines of form (though *not* necessarily spacial shadings . . . . which he minimized by front lighting); and thereby he created his costume-demons as double-agents . . . . spies on his side . . . . demonstrating, so to speak, the defeat of all such monstrousness. George finally came to play The Devil himself again and again: and his witches came to take the very revenge that he himself desired. With masterful complexity George proceeded to play-out the war with spies and counter-spies of triumphant vision. His films became anagrams of incredible duplicity as he abrogated more and more powers of transformation to himself and his self's hero magician . . . . or witch . . . . or demon . . . . or devil, even.

But George could not honestly bring any aspect of his dismembered being to identify with either inanimate object or depth-of-space. The 'sets' were always "given over" to the demons . . . . his only control of them being the warning sign of their visage—thus visibility—and 'change of scene.' Inevitably, therefore, George came up against cosmic disaster . . . . his defeat by material itself and the space of its residence—demon strata!

George, at the time of life a man just begins to feel himself as 'ageing,' would have surrendered were it not for the emergence of a new hero-image in his dreams—the only hero who might possibly pass through the veils of materiality and traverse all cosmological stuffing . . . . the last (for George) heroic trick in the bag: The Machine: yes! . . . . the hero-as-machine—old Golem again—young Venus maybe too, who'd once before given him a new lease on struggle: The Machine-as-photographed . . . . The Machine-as-pictured through the means of machinery—something like a 'hall of mirrors' reflecting mirrors, *ad infinitum,* to confound all material sense and punch a hole in the whole of universal space.

Was it not the perfect servant or "helper" of The Magician? Was it not that absolute contradiction to confound demonology?—inasmuch as The Machine *was* material, yet animate beyond any human capability . . . . was there any limit to the space a machine might traverse?—the master of it, himself, utterly inside its armor. Was it not a thing made up of many inanimate parts which were put together and came to 'life' then as they were fueled to interact perfectly with each other in a miraculous entirety of moving being? The Machine was—yes!—kin-creator to George—his bloodless (therefore humanly invulnerable) brother . . . . and woman, too (for be it automobile or boat or aeroplane or rocket, even, some 'unwritten law' had always made it be lovingly called a "her"): she, any machine, was—yes!—the triumph of all his imagining and actual invention . . . . the wildest Galatea of all Pygmalion time—"let 'er rip" through Time itself, if possible, and all black space, shaking shadows off herself in each shift of gear, turn of wheel, whirl of The Magician's motivation as she/he tore through the film's cast fast as frames could touch her/his movement across the screen.

The Machine of his dreams became star of his dramas, defying all actor-scoffers—knocking 'em down when they got in the way . . . . knocking down walls, houses, and all such blocks or blockheads of material . . . . putting out the eye of the moon . . . . jostling stars, even—and all the while protecting The Magician (and his friends), carrying him as gently as a baby in a cradle . . . . as a baby in the womb . . . . as man entombed . . . .

Yes—alas—The Machine failed George too, finally . . . . it was for all its animation a recognizable shape; and as such it fell into every dark trap of illumination—fell, as a train, once, into the sun's mouth . . . . damned those within it to the same set-to of all inanimate scenery. As a recognizable object The Machine could never be more than subject matter: thus George's photo-plays still whirled shamanistically their dance flashing blacks and whites against impenetrable screen.

George desperately tried color toward the last—dyeing the celluloid—having images of objects (often The Machine) tinted tones that might vibrate them into another dimension of thought . . . . brushed-in hues over the black and white shape on every single

frame to shift the dark/light trap of photo-genesis. But he only managed to paint himself into a beautiful corner: (color is a quality of light—a qualification then . . . . a diminishment as surely as shadow).

The battle was over—without there having actually been a fight—and George was left with reels of projectionable maps of a campaign only imagined . . . . a record of sympathetic magic that had failed the maker's inner tension—had failed to alter for him what had already been. He had directed and acted a series of pretensions; and he had been (as all artists before him) simply used by forces beyond his imagined "2nd coming"—his 'coming again'—his comprehension.

No artist has ever been permitted to comprehend the work he creates: only those who do creatively attend it are permitted to second-guess its actual being . . . . make game of it . . . . hunt down the beasts of it in lairs of their own angelic orders. Only those who exert as much creative energy apprehending the work of art as it took to make it, can break the traps of form that whirl an almost impenetrable cocoon of habit-sense around revelation. But the audiences of George's day were having NONE of *THAT* you may be sure . . . . certainly NOT any Gordion knots to be unraveled on their 'evening's out'—no!, not ever . . . . never, then, any reminder, please, of what each man, woman, and child had forfeited pre-birth . . . . not, for god's sake, any labyrinthining amidst our pleasure—: let us, rather, be spirit *only*, escaping in a gas of distractive words, music and images meaning no thing whatsoever: let the gods and demons *have* of us what they will, what they have *had*, so long as our play is surely fun and free and we reasonably assured of soul's immortality.

An industry of imitators began making films like George's, but films which carried no weight of obsession, no haunt, no art. These 'escape movies' freed audiences from the strange discomforts and the apprehensions which George's elicited in even the most dense sensibility. George could not compete with his imitators and thus lost all commercial stance for his cosmic act.

Toward the last he tried to make a "come-back," as it's called, and he made a series of movie dramas which premised his primal scene of dismemberment *as if* it had been at the hands of audience on the darkling plain of the auditorium . . . . as if the hands and heads of the clapping and laughing wealthy members of society—black with evening dress—had torn him/George to pieces . . . . as indeed they had. His commercial failure—at their hands—had taught George lessons more immediate to his daily living than those he had learned in the womb. But these social dramas of the last years of his creating posed no war—as had the fantasies of all previous making . . . . George was by then too defeated in all his being to manage even imaginary battle. He used the motion picture machine finally, almost as if to write a letter to 'the worldly'—pleading the cause of 'the poor' . . . . asking shelter and food, *at least* for the abandoned baby or starving child he now felt himself to be. Sometimes he asked in these literaries his films had become to be invited again to the bacchanal—the birthday party of all beast scene . . . . the celebration of demon's day amidst the rich (those who epitomized, for George, the humans that lived most successfully with dismemberment). In other films he sometimes fancied powers of goodness that would take pity upon his orphaned self and all such outcasts of a Victorian society obviously given-over to an evil that existed on, now, moral grounds—rather than fields of cosmic disorder. He envisioned all church, for instance, as just another theatre where audience gathered to escape . . . . rather than attend the messages of angels. He had no hero anymore, nor invention either. All that was left to his imagination was that old 'mothering' heroine: Christian Charity. His every plot now was dedicated to arousing this spirit-of-pity in each spectator or at least to haunt every eye with this goodly ghost. His scenes now were only supports of an aesthetic propaganda—for yes, these plays, though Charity advertisements, were still sufficiently "*of* an art" to establish a realm of consideration beyond George's wishes . . . . were more than the moral pleadings he imagined them to be: they did, as a matter of incredible fact, anticipate the aesthetic milieu of the next great film artist, D W Griffith, and prophetically announce the subject which would most interfere with the light of this new art for the next twenty-five years. D W Griffith was to go to war in this matter and marshal pictured "fact" as his army against social indifference: but George Méliès was reduced to begging *for* sympathy . . . . rather than *in* sympathetic magic . . . . and had only sentiment on his side.

George's visual pleas went altogether over the heads of his audience, raining tears down out of their eyes instead of diamonds for either him or 'the poor:' he therefore failed himself once again . . . . failed (as all artists do) to achieve anything reasonable to himself—for the muse-force in a man only uses "reason" . . . . feeds on it from inside out, destroying it while assuming its logical shape . . . . feeds on the maker, turning him inside out—destroys every idea he has of himself, finally even of himself-as-artist. George was luckier than many (having that 'luck' of the very hard-worker): he exhausted most of his aesthetic possibilities in his late middle age.

Magician that he was, he managed to vanish from popular sight, effected completely his disappearance from 'The World' as it's called, and attained, at least, a private life. All his failures in the realm of heroics proved useful at last in that kingdom-of-acceptance any 'daily living' is: George had identified sufficiently

with every imaginable creature and condition of circumstance to manage a livelier/happier personal existence than most men even day-dream. Certainly no nightmares could ever take him by terrible surprise again. He continued to see the shifting faces in the fire's dark of his hearth and all those leering from his living-room walls, floors, furnishings—the visages of all wood-work . . . . the shapes in the irregularities of plaster, *etcetera:* but these had become 'familiars,' so to speak, and must often have seemed even friendly—charged as they were with the nostalgia of acknowledged enmity grown old . . . . : certainly they were no longer terrifying to him as they were when he was a child.

He married the proprietress of a candy store and became, thus, shopkeeper at center of children's world. He had children of his own; and he certainly did everything he could to protect them and all his candy customers too, from any fate at all like his: but still he couldn't entirely resist playing The Magician at times for them—performing small parlor tricks for their amazement . . . . tiny transformations reduced to the stage of his aged hands, alive with loving movement in a flutter of tricks—a 'now-you-see-it/now-you-don't' amusement before the admiring eyes of a child: and he would then, more often than not, show how it was done . . . . so that there should be no sensibility trap left in the wake of his game with them.

When he was a very old man—and his children fully grown and, happily, none of them artists . . . . or even magicians . . . . he was re-discovered, recognized, in his candy shop by a government official. His films, having a life of their own quite separate from his, had become established film classics in the meantime. Something in each of these films drew people to look at them again and again: after all the laughs had spent their force, and the films had entertained to their fullest extent, there still remained an attraction to them beyond popularity—some felt-quality of power unleashed in each . . . . as if they were—*as in fact they are*—one of the greatest untapped natural resources in the world . . . . if only one could penetrate their surface and release the real energy of them. George, of course, had no such notion of them: they had failed him much as children will fail a father—had failed to even make him a living, let alone to restore him to some whole being . . . .; and he was more-than-a-little surprised at the attention they belatedly brought him like some old soldier decorated twenty/thirty years after his defeat on the field of battle.

George was awarded for *god* knows what reason, the French Legion of Honor medallion . . . .

. . . . He died a very short time after.

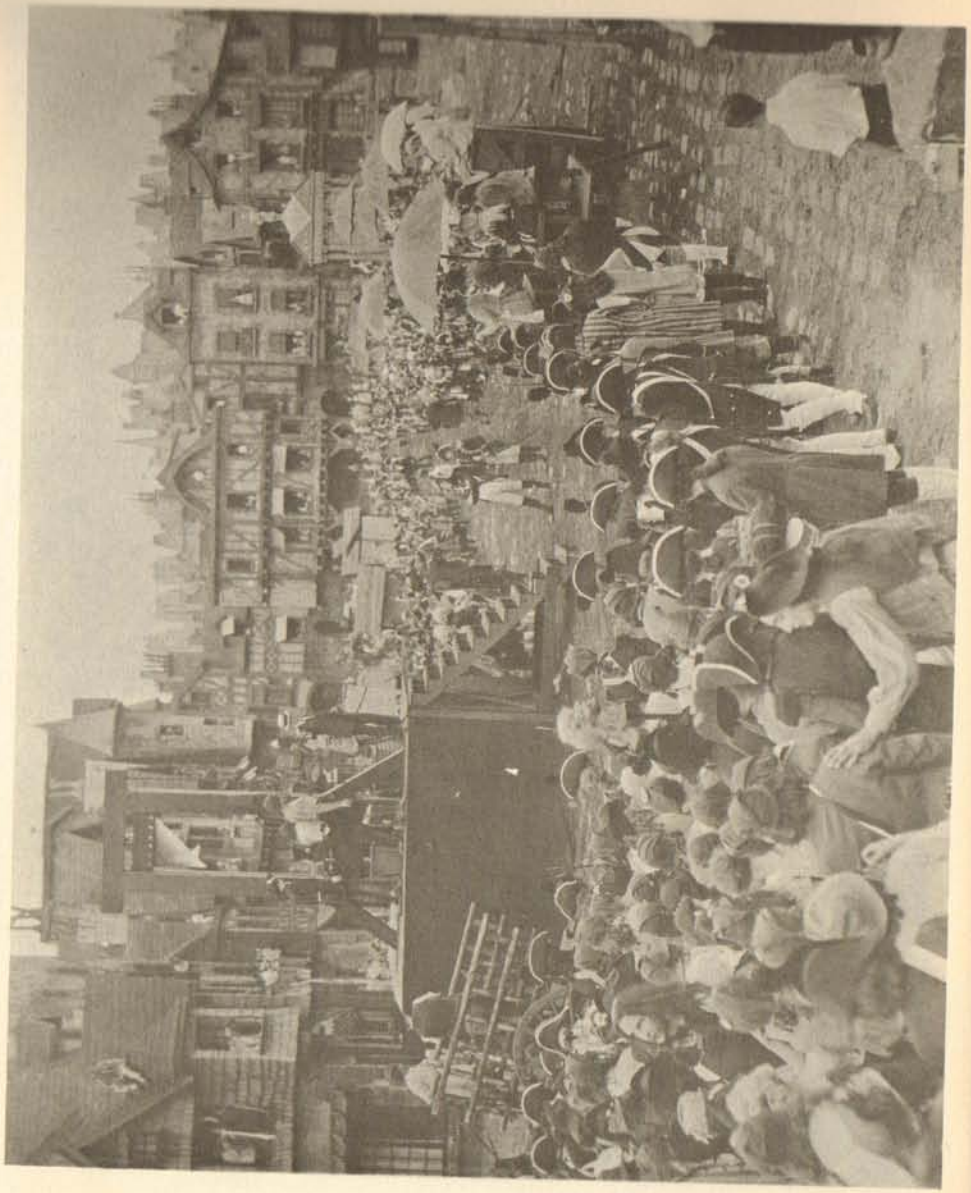
David Wark Griffith

This essay is dedicated to
Seymour Stern

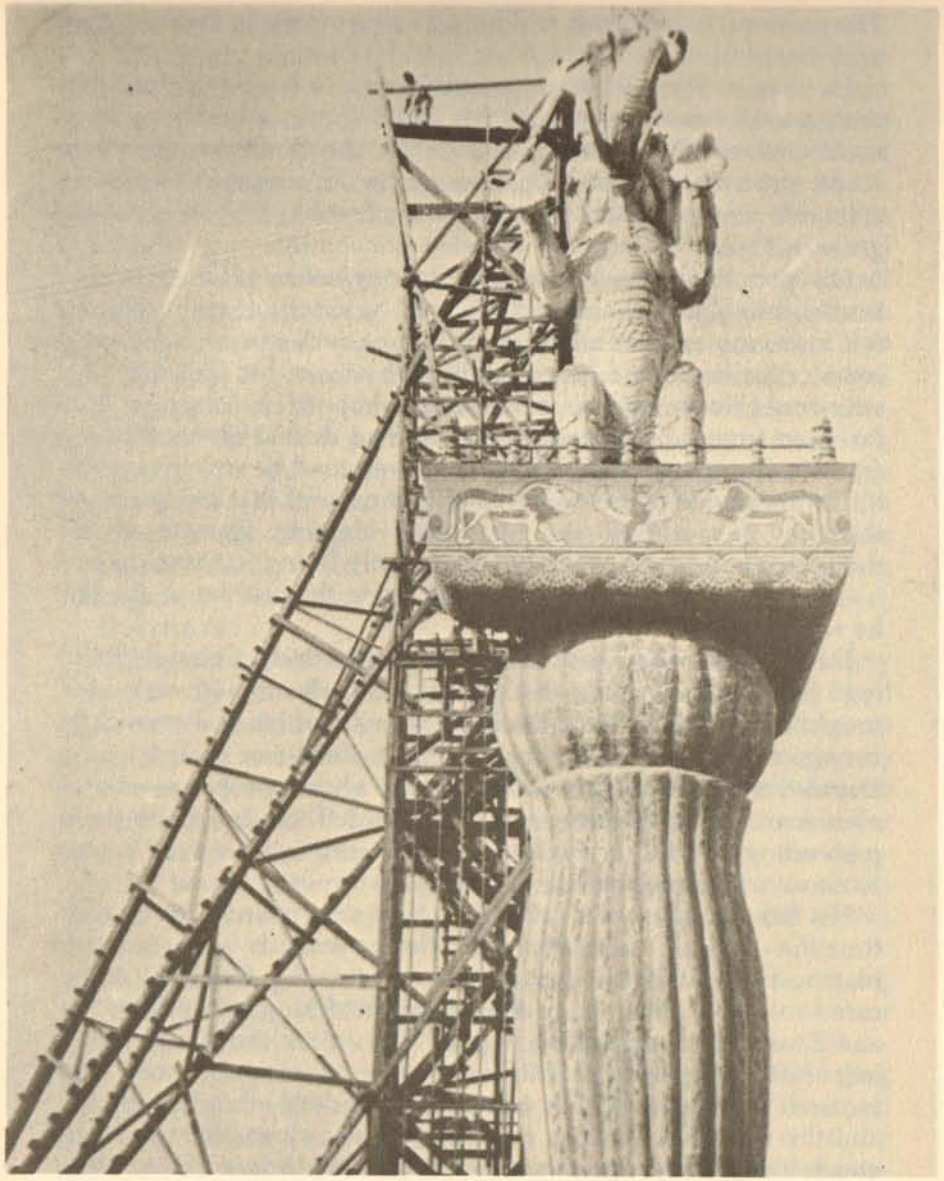
David Wark Griffith

Mr. Griffith

Production shot on location of *Way Down East*, 1920; Billy Bitzer with camera behind D.W.



On location of *Orphans of the Storm,* 1921; Griffith directing traffic



Disassembling the set of *Intolerance,* 1916

They named him David: and he was to grow up to *become* a giant and slay himself.

He was an American and a Southerner—a bean-pole-of-a-boy with a wild, timid, swagger to his walking . . . . a hesitancy in all conversation. He cut his eye-teeth on the Southern moon: he could stare straight into the face of the sun: he spit to put out stars. He was born 'ten-feet-tall' in his feeling; and he grew and grew and grew.

His 'people' had been wronged not long before his birth; and he knew, youngly, he was The One born to set the matter right. He felt a destiny river run between his toes, a destiny wind tug the hairs of his head; and he grew shy with others, his kin-folk even, who could not bring themselves to see how tall he'd grown, how far apart from head to toe his destiny had drifted all his thinking from their sense of things. They'd still pretend he was their size—his mother wishing normalcy for her boy—and that his too-much thinking was a fault . . . . his father blaming shyness on his thought. They were defeated in their daily living . . . . as they had been by the war . . . . and could not bring themselves to see that he was not!

David's father had been 'the spirit of war' itself: Colonel "Roaring" Jake Wark Griffith, the kind of man who though wounded, fought on and on and on—the Martian wind of his nick-name, the very growing spirit of his song . . . . the air-of-war puffing young David into existence. But wounds were all his people saw—their eyes enslaved by defeat—: and David 'bided' his time with them, pretending to be knee-high to himself, and shyly moved among all those who'd toe-the-line of imprisoned spirit.

His father's tales were taller than he'd yet grown in his own estimation—and all illustrated with fleshy wounds and scars and blazing eyes and battle lines of facial feature: his father, War, became to David, Story . . . . a wind-spirit of language telling . . . . and Drama—the expression of aged face, more terrible in the silent shifts of flesh than in the husky voice or remembrances: wind moaned in the eves of talk and told of the dead who died in vain: and the masks of sadness and horror, seen close, were the very ghosts themselves come forth on War-father's face to beg to be laid-to-rest at last—though some came to ask revenge . . . . these the most horrible of all.

David had a sister, Mattie, who in fact 'mothered' him: she it was who told him the secrets of The Fates—his destiny as it had been before—and The Muse . . . . the goddess of all human life as it is to be. If War-father shaped the soul of David, then Mattie spirited his mind. She finally entered his head, when it had grown large enough to contain her entirety, and remained there unchanged—his guiding spirit—all his life: for David, like all giants, was inherently stupid and, without Mattie, he could never have fulfilled his destiny to right all wrongness. Wrong IS clever! Right is always simple-minded and therefore often loses its stance to tricks. But Mattie would 'see to' that; for she was American Hope incarnate: a woman of culture—refined on this continent to an innocence untouched by even her own sophistication . . . . found in the South as an unknowing creature who yet knows all—a vessel of civilization who moves with the grace of her whole culture, yet is utterly unmotivated by what she carries . . . . mind of Southern memory untouched by mattering—a dream woman, innocent as a baby mammaling . . . . as ephemeral as sound, these symbol wenches, spiced with the Frenchiness of New Orleans—these Southern Belles! Mattie was perfect—as all Southern women—for minding men . . . . a tireless mother-ringing, unchanging, influencing—utterly plastic (in the hands of men) and completely intact (in the minds of men), no matter the touch, baby goddess, all loveliness and gloss! Mattie could remain an absolute slippery solid of love through any War-father's or Sun's inferno.

And she did . . . .

Young giant, David, knew The Bible and knew thus his destiny explicit—and knew his father, Jacob's, too . . . . knew the fate of all those who wrestled with angels—knew better than to wrestle even 'angel' Mattie in his mind. His strength was brute and his fate culturally sealed: he was to kill himself at high-noon of his living, as death's example to all the others—the enemy as well as his kin defeated . . . . to teach the victors Mercy . . . . to teach the vanquished how to die . . . . to teach both how to live in peace—God's rest to all ghosts . . . . (yes, hunks of Christ broke off in his Psyche).

Young dumb giant David did then shyly hide his size among his defeated people's littleness, and assume the shapes of their cultural stance from his mothering sister Mattie, and share his father's war-likeness, sure as "Wark," in the spirit of languaging story, and grow till he towered like a Goyaesque god above all past's battlefield and human misery . . . . or as if this were the genie of his eye's light and he a tweed-suited, straw-hatted, bespectacled, cane-carrying Aladdin, inclined to rub his closed lids at every wonder and make his wishes amidst a shower of closed-eye sparks and cameo-ed visions. This teen-age dreamer with his Mattie intact and tucked into the folds of his brain, this young man, then, half Paul Bunyan and half John Appleseed, set off for the Big City to seek the fortune of his death . . . . (following, thus, that American small-town instinct of the self-dissatisfied—thus U.S.-destined—, as repetitive, generation to generation, as salmon's spawn).

Big 'sin' City then, where small-town Americans go to hide-and-seek and heroes to die, became young David's home. He hid at first and sought employ as part of his play—gathering 'warps' for the Story of himself among the American hucksters . . . . (much like the 'carpet-baggers' who had come in the guise of traveling salesmen to strip what wealth of his South the war had left—to cheat his 'people' in the variable name of Freedom—the game of 'free enterprise' their prison): oh!, David would learn, for surety, the capitolian system and take it unto himself . . . . would demonstrate its death-dealing inside-out at his own undoing: he harbored a wolf in all his sheepishness who wished to devour the wicked world—*this* the Drama that tugged his lean cheek-bones, mellowed his eyes, and stopped all comedy on his face at a mesh of squint wrinkles and an ironed smile.

Nervous as he was with such pre-tensions, and having always played a-part from all the 'others,' what more natural for him than to become an actor—that salesman of the imagined soul . . . . geist-huckster in chameleon-bag of his own skin. But he was no ordinary actor—nor extraordinary, either—hadn't studied the craft to accomplish the stagey artifice of his day . . . . no: he became an 'extra'—a character in search of his own authorship—in a series of dramatic "novelties:" "toys" as 'the movies' were thought-to-be at this time . . . . a short story told with "still" picture-cards which a nickel would set whirling in simulation of motion in the nickelodeon. What David did would hardly have been called "acting" then: for already the movie-makers had discovered "life-likeness" to be more convincing in these pictures than Dramatics as it was projected from The Stage. David, who had much childhood-practised pretense at "life-likeness," prospered at this play of empiric deception—all the while searching for the bits of part that would eventually give him his place . . . . not just as a name in lights, as actors want to prove their existence, finiteness—but rather his search was for a place in the sun, high-noon . . . . infinitude.

The Eagle's Nest brought him closest to this (right) of his wish and convinced him he could go no higher as actor. For some time he had been playing in movies made for darkened auditoriums, rather than brief boxed flips of nickelodeon—veritable 'epics' in comparison to the toy vignettes . . . . long flicks, these, wherein an actor could develop the character he was playing—play it out to some more psychological fulfillment. In *The Eagle's Nest* David played 'The Father' of a baby snatched by a giant eagle—played 'the rescuer' of his childhood self from that rapacious bird-symbol Northern America had taken (as Rome and Napoleon before) to stand for its warring flights-of-fancy: The Eagle, vicious bird-of-prey, tearing into the innocent, harmless creatures of the earth

and carrying them off to its nest: and young David climbing this giant height to fight with bare hands this Eagle beast and kill it . . . . and rescue the/'his' child. It was no 'bit-part': he was 'the lead'—the leader—in this drummed-in, since his childhood, whole role of his being. He could go no further as an actor: he knew he must now assume power over actors and captain authorship itself for his necessary Drama.

(One cannot help but pause and wonder what the history of The United States would have been had 'our' forefathers chosen The Turkey-cock, as Ben Franklin suggested, for national standard. Certainly The Eagle was specifically North-eastern ideal—the idol of those who looked-to-the mountains, thought of preying on the land as the bird itself did . . . . the fur-trappers with their talons of steel . . . . the carpet-baggers with their claws of thieves-law . . . . the whole survival-of-the-fittest clan who twisted freedom in jaws of their own devising. Certainly The Southern and South-western farmer *shot* such-like birds and thought of them with no more respect than he would a rat or any-creature-else who might threat his chicks and, yes, turkey-cocks and other domestic animals. But The Southern, as well as Northern, farmer lived in the schizophrenia of painter Hick's *Peaceable Kingdom:* all God's creatures living-together/feeding-on-each other . . . . impossible Christian contradiction . . . . a farm the very jaw of Man itself, crunching familiars—each farmer eating himself alive in spasms of bitter domestic guilt—each feeding his child the flesh of trusting creatures unequally in his care. The Northeastern ideal was at least more straight, saved the nation from eating its domestic heart out, except in Thanksgiving.)

(It is amazing, the power of unconscious persuasion any bird as symbol can have over men—particularly as the roots of human admiration for winged creatures is almost always twisted beyond recognition . . . . : Mattie, in David's mind, would have it that bird-song was Joy. Surely giant David, in animal dumbness, must have known all song was threat, the bird's defense of his territory: the entwine of these twin knowledges made birds prime forces of aesthetic depth in maturely-tortured David's work, as did all such clashes of 'culture' and IN-sensitivity in his nature. Latter-day 'Matties' would have The Dove—a creature who, given the chance, will torture its own kind slowly to death—be a symbol of Peace: David Griffith, in his greatest film, hitched such like winged horses to a tiny cart bearing gifts of a warrior king to his virgin beloved.)

But—to get back to a younger, lesser David—he began, then, mid film career to direct movies, to 'lord' it over his play and wag his own tales in the light: as the cameras whirled, recording actor

gestures, David, like a puppet-master pulled the strings of their every movement, telling them each action to take, making up the drama as it rolled along being photographed, often without any rehearsal. It was child's-play allright—"Now, pretend you're very happy"—"Now, look angry!" . . . . : for whatever the story the movie was supposed to be telling, the motion pictures spoke to all audience with bits and snatches of gesture and all other action most effectively made-up while actually filming—an actor's response to director's instruction quicker than either could think . . . . quick as life itself. Somehow early in his careering, this David/Goliath saw Accident as the prime death-dealer/life-giver in every drama: he often deliberately confused his actors in order to pitch their dramatic stances into a play of Fate—a chancy operation for sure, with even the best of pantomimists (as in the tradition of *Commedia Dell'Arte*) . . . . but with untrained amateurs it was a calculated risk that stripped the last vestiges of stagey make-believe from before the movie spotlight and laid these photo-plays as barely real as cross-section slides under microscope. The actors and actresses often became as if suddenly spot-lighted in the attempted escape from prison of each his-or-her-self and/or the act/theft of another's soul: their (photo-screened) faces often went blank for an instant (in response to an unrecorded director's command) and therefore took on (as illuminated) looks of real looking, actual searching for expression, action, as if each were possessed of an inner god-consciousness (as they had been by David's voice) which drove them inside out. David thus fathered Western traditional fatality into the movies: it only remained for him to expand this "realistic" drama to giant proportions and to move it beyond studio lighting and into the sun . . . . and one thing other: to accommodate the whole-of-it to/fore-'Mattie' culture!

Others had been working this 'uppity' side of the street for centuries and mining mind's-eye/dream-stuff above all mattering, too: the whole aesthetic West had chosen again and again to trust the eyes above all knowing (as Louis Zukofsky proves conclusively in his great book *Bottom on Shakespeare*)—the sound synonym of "eye" itself a prime affirmative . . . . "the ayes *have* it!", etc. The arts of West's 19th century, especially literature and music, distorted their natural means as if in effort to give birth to motion pictures—novels, shifting away from writ's ends in *de*-script, attempted to 'give the picture,' moving as language does (as Sergei Eisenstein was to prove in his book *Film Form,* many 19th century novels can be now used as effective filmscripts without changing a single word) . . . . so-called "program music" attempted, through tone textures corresponding to kin-visual feelings, to elicit scene,

a seeing from all hearing, and thus to put this most abstract art at the service of aura-outing to the expense of all traditional audio—the line of all painterly development thickened, all out-line blurred in a frenzy to investigate the properties of light, the possibilities of movement: motion pictures HAD to be invented . . . . because the innate *need* for such a thing was tearing all arts to pieces in unsuccessful simulation.

Now whereas most European film-makers inherited a Latin name for this new absolutely necessary art ("Cinematographer," for instance derivative of the term "writer of movement"), American David learned it called "moving pictures"/"movies," "Flickers"/"flics," and was himself to coin the term "Sun-play," and even copyright it, to 'cover' his dramatic manifestations through this medium: his emphasis was always more directed to motion and illumination of "the real"—as the name of his own company, "Biograph Co." would indicate . . . . "photo," then, was means to a graphic end—a graph of "reality": and this became a *style* with him shaped absolutely by what was most "real" to the medium itself: :the very track of light.

It can be said that every artist creates by intruding his personal experiences into the purity of medium—and that he achieves an art out of this intrusion to the extent he respects the medium . . . . is true to its means . . . . more than his self's expression therethru. If this be true, then David Wark Griffith became an artist quite by Accident—the same quality of accident he honored in all his motion picture making. His giant simple-mindedness depended absolutely upon uncomplicated notions—such as "right" and "wrong"—and, like all people simplistically motivated, his god was "Truth": but "Truth," like all 20th century gods, had become tricked-out as concept by too much wrong-doing in its name . . . . : thus David had to settle for 'fact' as his guiding principle of eventual goal—as many another pragmatic man of his time . . . . : and thus the 'fact' of light's track along the strip of film, and its lens-shaped life-likeness, came to fascinate him above all consideration of his personal morality: the celluloid strip was after all a record of light's movement (that was how film existed in 'fact'): these movements were more 'life-like' when Accident prompted them or when David created 'the unexpected' to destroy his actors preparedness ('the unexpected' being all he knew of Fate as factual): it only remained for him/David to frame it . . . . IE, to satisfy the Mattie in his mind and thus fulfill his destiny *culturally*—"in good taste" etc. . . . . (for this was a 'right' too—as in "the right way" etc.): thus he became a Grammarian: arranger of accidental happenstance 'any-which-way' expressions into

as-if-absolute forms and orders of pre-determined consideration. It was an old trick which in language usage had for centuries made the dumbest people seem the wisest, buried all new barbarian thought in clichés of punctuation, or negated new-thought-magic altogether because of its bad spell. Grammar-in-fact was the twined consideration where-with David sought to set the stage to set the matter right.

Another man who looked just like him—Woodrow Wilson—brought American grammarian logic into government at this same time . . . . sought to traditionalize living history: and he was, too, to exemplify the death of all traditional goodness in the face of contemporary governmental evil. David rose to commercial prominence during the same period this Princeton scholar became President of The U.S.: they were twins of identical destiny—these two men . . . . Woodrow of its finite manifestation, and David of its infinite—Woodrow to die literally, as martyred example, and David to die symbolically, exemplifying the martyrdom of his giant animality to the murderous innocence of his Kentucky-farmer-self.

At the crossroads of his life, giant 'Goliath' Griffith had written the *Crossroads of Life* and starred his David-self in the leading role as suitor of a clergyman's daughter. In the story he wrote, the girl is finally forced to choose between 'the life of an actress' and her father's forgiveness—between suitor David and her dad . . . . : she chooses daddy: two months later, mid-1908, our living hero signs his Griffith-name to a contract specifying he'll direct films for The Biograph Co. Very few any longer call him "David"—"D W" and/or simply "Griffith" is his name . . . . his giant self begins to move through economic power as an actual force in the world. David now 'bides' his time as never before, hardly making an appearance either on or off the screen.

Mattie it is who begins to emerge—first, perhaps as "the clergyman's daughter" . . . . always, anyway, some woman as vessel of virginity about to be broken—some girl-with-Achilles-heel . . . . a heroine . . . . carrying charm unknown to her, about to be stolen by an institutionalized, unseeing man . . . . by heroic insensitivity. This the prime subjective matter of his time . . . . the very story those as-if-movie-scripted 19th century novels most often told—the unworthiness of the brute male, kneeling and bound foetally before his Belle, the Victorian clapper-maid, wide-eyed with ignorance of her own inestimable worth . . . . though she knew enough to defend the impeccableness of her carriage when his wolf-man-self, always with haired-over face, would villian-forth in the full of the moon. Dumb "Goliath" Griffith wrote it all down for himself like an idiot making notes in lieu of remembrance: and he directed it out for eye's light to the fullest conclusions of

illumining, trying every variation of 19th century themes which monkeying mind could imagine. He composed his pictures in absolute 'parrot' of French "salon" painting and British/American "genre" art, picking up every stitch of linear form for camera focus, which painting had begun to abandon in giving birth to film. His frame-line cropped all actresses to painterly busts: and full-lengths of all actor-stances were as traditionally composed as if arranged for Parisian waxmuseum. He was like a big boy belatedly having his childhood—covertly playing with flower dolls and leaden soldiers, destroying both in moments of self-disgust, yet persisting in a game which, albeit tardy, must be played-out (chips of Dionysus dropping off his giant shoulders).

One such game—of undestructive resolve—was Fate's writ direct: *Three Sisters,* old as fairy-telling, with every 19th century mellow-rot twist . . . . sister Mattie/Cinderella played by Mary Pickford, "America's sweetheart" who loves a blind man and manages with money to *cure* his insensitivity. But she, 'the ugly sister'—therefore 'death' itself—fears he'll not love her when he can actually see. He does, of course . . . . what choice had he under the circumstances? . . . . and the 19th century 'happy-ending' in—yes—Death, which all life IS when seen as "happily ever aftering," rolled on through D W's increasing exhaustion of these themes.

And where was David?—he now the genie bottled-up in movie-lamp blackness . . . . the victim of imitating enemy tactics—David now carpet-bagged, himself, and all but sold on the world wide Griffith market.

The 'blind' world fell for Pickford sweetness as sure as the heart of America had; and in fact the whole Southern Belle harem D W primed for the lights and manipulated in memory of his beloved Mattie. The giddy Gish sisters came along, wide-eyed and cupid-bow lipped in serene innocence—mellow Mae Marsh of sisterly mothering remembrance—or Miriam Cooper . . . . dark lady in the 'apple-pie' light of his eye . . . . and many many others the world came to call "The Griffith Girls."

Somewhere along this line of moonlighting, these format ladies began to get out of alignment, each coming into her own ritual world-wise as a "star" and/or that image which would best spark masturbation in the frustrated males of the attendant audience, and thus kindle envy in their female companions, wives, etc. Mad King Griffith found his harem invaded; and he hatched a series of penny-dreadful dramas exemplifying the terrible fate of all such villainy in the light of love's pure movie beam. His wish was to make each viewer feel these bits of feminine light, these "stars" then, as kin, as sister, as mother. This was, to him, a harem of virgins: (veils of 'immaculate conceptioning' blanketed his dance of

Salome thought: for his was the head of John Baptist already served on the platter to Mattie's stance . . . . as it *was to be* the head of Goliath severed in David's Luck: for he knew—as we all do—that young David could only win over the giant by way of Luck, by Accident, then, by God!, by all-the-Fates eventuality . . . . ; and, therefore, he worried not-at-all, these mid-career years, that Evil had tricked him out as King of its 19th century 'camp': he played the part to-the-hilt—was the world's first Hollywooden god . . . . therefore founded that American Holy Wood wherein, as of old, Adonis—as he was to become—must die).

While still 'sowing wild oats,' before he'd settled down to harem, DW found the perfect eunuch to dress his 'dolls' with proper light, the only real apparel of their existence on movie screen: he came to recognize the genius of Billy Bitzer—cameraman of Accident extraordinaire . . . . old 'chancy' Billy, Fate's darling—in the sense that angels always look-out-for the drunk, the fool, the child . . . . : Billy Bitzer, with the luck of the Irish, became Griffith's main cameraman—because he had the inevitable knack of making meaningful mistakes.

A 'mis-take' in film parlance is a photographic 'take' that must be 'taken' again—when, say, the lens' cleaning tissue is left hanging down over the lens . . . . unless of course angels arrange it there so that it filters the light—just so!—to veil the features of, say, a woman's face and thereby gives the world new vision of beauty . . . . an odalisque as if nude, so blurred are her clothes in disintegration of form, that one can imagine her flesh more surely than if she were photographed naked . . . . a woman soft as the halo of light itself, her features blurred to such indistinct feather-bedding she'll fit each individual man's masturbatory wishing—each woman's imagining herself in such light—: oh, yes! . . . . Billy Bitzer was—with angel's Luck—the perfect tailor of The Emperor's new photo clothes.

Billy'd forget to open his lens wide enough: and there—lo and behold!- was a cameo-ed portrait of the "star," ready made for the movie lockets of each man's mind. Bitzer's Luck was that he always 'goofed' with*in* the limits of Griffith's useability. He'd over-or-under-expose a shot: and there!—as Griffith saw it—would be a mood . . . . a mode of expressing emotion. But Billy was never so 'chancy' as to make blank leader, black *or* white—his 'angels' saw to that . . . . each 'slip' of his was but a slur of conventional image—a sling of slightly biased light.

(I want it to be clear that it was never much more than the Billy Bitzer in great Griffith's mind, a figure of his imagination, who could claim creative credit in the making of these meaningful mis-takes: DW Griffith worked camera magic equally well

through such cameramen as Karl Brown, photographer of panoramic desert shots of *Intolerance,* for instance, and Hendrik Sartov, primarily responsible for the delicate photographic beauty of *Broken Blossoms,* and Sartov and Paul Allen who together photographed *Orphans of the Storm,* to name a few: Billy Bitzer was himself a fortuitous 'accident,' happening along as, and when, he did into Griffith's hallucinatory usage.)

While Mattie could be said to begin to be mined as a merge of inner distinct "Griffith Girl" features, Billy could be said to be understood by "D W" as the "David"-geist that brought such forth into the light of projection: bit by Bitzer Bit, the spirit of giant slayer was loosed on the world.

He/David-hero waxed fat, also, on the sloth all giants suffer-forth in their bigness—such laziness as, for example, causes exact repetition in art . . . . that, for instance, an aesthetic immensity tends to thrash back-and-forth without variance over its self-destructive-termination: (think of the end of almost any 19th century symphony!)

(Take The Russians—those who, most in their music, sought to hatch visual counterpart to all audioing—starting with Glinka, who inherited, at the very beginning of this Russian first-classical music movement, the whole West's symphony orchestra, as if it were a single instrument . . . . unlike most cultural beginners who start song with single human voice . . . . an aesthetic immensity from Russian scratch—and Glinka sorely tempted as all after him to repeat a good thing when he heard it, again and again . . . . all those many notes to write down for just an instant of orchestral song—the temptation to double this time of music as simply as making the two-strokes and double-dots of a 'repeat-bar': thus the aesthetic of theme-and-repetition—as in Domenico Scarlatti—as distinct from the more normal Baroque theme-and-variations . . . . as in Bach . . . .)

And great "D W" took his "p's" and "q's" from mid-European 'program music' development—Wagnerian leitmotiv as an idea that was applicable to the editing of motion pictures—(oh, he would charm King Saul and us all with his harping) . . . . relying primarily on the whole German and Slavic 'tone poem' movement—as indeed he used this very music itself to accompany the images and engender appropriate 'mood' . . . . though he also intercut these 'long-hair' modes with bursts of contrasting folk song—(much like his unknown contemporary, the composer Charles Ives). Just so-much as a "p" and a "q" are alike yet therefore very clearly different, so-too movie-shot "repetitions" are likenesses, occurrences in the same mode or scenic mold which cause a difference-of-feeling more dynamic than contrasting im-

ages . . . . the "repeat" shot affecting all spectators almost as if it were a mirror-image of its previous self—further "repetitions" giving image multiple dimension as if all scene were reflected in mirrors reflecting mirrors: (thus "D W" discovered for film, as Gertrude Stein did—at the same time—*à propos* language . . . . that repetition is impossible: and 'as-if repeating' is a strengthening of all psychological reflectiveness).

(Therethru this accident, this by-product of laziness, a new aesthetic was loosed through music, language, and motion picture art in the 20th century—IE, ... a force which would automatically cut-down any huge and complex world of art to, for the simplest emotional—let us say: "Davidian":—understanding).

It can be seen again and again that great Griffith had a personal *subject* that mattered enough to him to warrant endless as-if-repetition in great laziness; and it can be seen that this had very little to do with the 'Accident' of his *objective* destiny—almost nothing therefore to do with here-to-fore/Mattie-culture . . . . nor with Davidian law in his nature. The seed of all his subject matter can be found in an early work called *A Corner In Wheat:* it is a work of guilty conscience rather than a work-of-art—might have been writ by the very villainous 'rich man' it postulates as 'lead' . . . . or by his selfish daughter. It was, in fact, written by rich Griffith himself and was marketed by him for all it was worth; and it was one, among those many 19th 'penny dreadful' century laments, of "the plight of the poor" victimized by "the industrial revolution." With his penchant for 'fact,' D W drew on actual incident and as usual 'milked it' to Death—beyond all *but personal* Truth in the matter . . . . IE, he postulated 'the rich man's,' *his own,* death at film's end—his 'black' self buried under wheat's white/movie flour in forced morality beyond any actual occurrence.

The "plight" shots repeat, thus disintegrating "the poor"—seen 'before and after' *A Corner In Wheat* etc. . . . . the poor farmer's sowing-of-seed a moving copy of American "genre" art. The shots of 'the rich' tend *not* to repeat—the "industrialist" seen in all his operations *as* "revolutionist" . . . . until of course his 'fall' (when revolution becomes turn of the same old wheel of Death). But (until then) all depiction of wealth is visually progressive—seen as an increasing complexity of visual development . . . . photographed in imitation of 19th century French 'salon' art.

All the subjective elements of Griffith's later greatest works are to be found in this brief Biograph—but very little of his art . . . . very little Bitzer 'Accident' at all in this work . . . . thus practically nothing of David, except as he was to be pitied as *of* "the poor"—and except in-as-much as it was clear he/"the poor" would endure beyond all "industrial" Death. Mattie/'culture-lady' is definitely slandered in a visual slur of white-womanly featurings and gestures buyable as Hell itself—seen in the film's black and white morality as black's 'dupe' . . . . a superficiality sustained by wealth: and so she was, too, to be seen again and again in Griffith's *Intolerance*—just as black was, from all his Southern upbringing, to be always seen as inherently 'bad,' be-it 'tux' or color-of-skin, be it mustache of villain or negroid threat in *The Birth of a Nation.*

Comparison of *A Corner In Wheat* with any of great Griffith's later work, will show us more clearly than is usually visible that subject matter has really nothing whatever to do with the make of an art. *Because* David, Wark, 'Mattie,' Griffith, in all the multiple complexity of his nature, was essentially an Artist-by-Accident, he was naturally among the very greatest the world has ever hatched: he did never know enough of himself to too-much interfere with The Muse's use of him—nor Fate's accidental splendor, either . . . . nor to save any part of him selfishly from the whole of his fathering-forth—as every man must for better or worse—his Destiny in-deed, in deadly earnest, in Death at last.

Let us gather, then/now, ladies and gentlemen, to watch this, the likes of which The World has never seen before—that a man should kill his giant-self with his child's littleness . . . . and do it before his 'lady'/sister to them both—in the full of the sun—in the full of pride of each of them . . . . Oh!—ladies/gentlemen . . . . it could only happen here—in America . . . . now—in this 20th of our western centuries.

See great Griffith in your mind's eye 60 feet tall in his camera tower, hovering over platoons of actors, costumed for a mock of Civil War battle and spread across miles of a meadowland where such battle once actually happened—those closest to Griffith appearing as toy soldiers from his height . . . . those furtherest from him looking like bacteria on a microscopic slide: and see him, then, ladies and gents, smile the smile of Woodrow Wilson and pick up, yes!, a field telephone (such as was right then being used at the 'fronts' of World War I) and with the smallest, softest voice imaginable, precipitate puffs of flowering white and charges of masses of dots across all the landscape beneath him: and look at him raise his hand there/then—like Michelangelo's God touching Adam—and bring Billy Bitzer to camera action . . . . all accomplished with the American-ease whereby one might sing:

Will you bake a cherry pie?
Billy boy, Billy boy . . .
Will you bake a cherry pie?
Charming Billy.

See the benign eye of Great Griffith—teacherly spectacles of him framing his Spectacular . . . . all this landscape exploding just off the top of his neatly parted hair: 'hats off' to him, folks!: :this 'man of peace' has just dreamed up one hell of a war: See!—no one gets hurt . . . . those men fall down in this boyish game, only to get up and fall down again (a Buddhist dream): the effects are realistic enough in gruesome fact to satisfy De Sade himself—black movie blood almost drips off the screen . . . . prop bodies are flung like an angry child's dolls through aerials of flickering light and black photo smoke-quakes (the marathon dream of The Romans showing again)—later to be tinted yellows and reds, to look as if the projector itself was belching fire and raining down blood on the audience (the dream of The Apocalypse, then) . . . . and yet, in benign Griffith's mind, "The War To End All War" (the A #1 American dream of toyhood fights made game.) This bloody, battle mocking hunt for peace was also Wilson's governmental sport—his 'soldiers' too were never meant to have "died in vain" . . . . IE: in the quick of Death's earnest vanity . . . . anymore than all West's Crusaders were meant to die—never to rise again. What giant Griffith newly created for this warrior sport was an art of it (despite himself) which could/would repeat its deaths and resurrections through film's exactitudes, in-ad-absurdum—breaking down the huge complexity of War as subject to its deadly simple objectives . . . . ups-and-downs, *ad nauseum.*

You can almost see Mattie flitting about the towering platform of him, there, arranging Billy Bitzer's compositions as carefully fine as if setting table places for Alice's mad tea party, poking puffs of smoke into balanced visual cushions, stoking fires for neatest hearth, tucking them into compositional corners, sweeping shadow armies, even, before the broom of traditional logic—hanging both pots and panoramas together in magnificent Kitchen comfort . . . . fluffing facial features, even, to starch of heroic picture stance—unfurling actors, in their gestures, as if they were flags in battle paintings.

But see now folks, how Billy Bitzer begins to run, his camera amok under all these womanly cultural pressures—as if to counteract all this 'class' he cuts loose vulgar photo capers like farts in church . . . . jiggles the box, twirls the lens, dances with the light itself on the very edge of the tables of photographic probability—as if to show the 'high-falutin' a-thing-or-two, he pushes his luck to new extremes!

Oh, Praise our Griffith, in Davidian greatness, that he lets Billy, looses him, loves him for it: these blessed mis-takes: these blasphemous Accidents: these drunken measures which further newness into the medium.

And Bless ol' "D W" too, that he hosts both forces in his nature—thus must fuss to please Mattie amidst Billy's poltergeisting . . . . must mother these Bitzer inventions himself, and train them to do the tricks-of-the-trade and wed them thus to meaning—must make a motion picture grammar as refined, through repetition, as Mattie herself and all her culture.

And give him a round of applause that he managed this tea-party-teeth-and-toe-nail-teaching in good fun—as a hell-raising-heaven-to-earthy fellow . . . . a jolly-sad man if ever there was one (how would you like to host such a gathering, as was in him, for all eternity?)

A moment of silence then that, amidst all this partying, he also managed an art to come out of him—and that he hugely, even, brooded beautifully upon it . . . . his own death.

He could not anyway stop it: everything he *thought* he was doing led contrariwise to what he *knew* he was.

His investors slowed him down a bit, crippled *The Birth of A Nation* for him, as 19th century investors had *his* birth in hatch of War and clutch of carpet-bag. They cut the heart of Truth—fact beat—out of all sense of conflict . . . . made senseless War as usual—IE, a war that cannot be *sensed.* For instance, they edited-out—or worse yet forced him to it—the shots of Northern slavers raiding African villages, a New England cleric blessing the sale of a half-naked slave girl, the rape of a white girl by a negro and the whole sequence of his terrifying trial, castration, and tortured death by The Ku Klux Klan, as well as fact-finder Griffith's photo-documenting Lincoln's letter to Stanton stating *his* dis-belief in racial equality and depiction of "Lincoln's solution" to American racism: the plan to deport all negroes "Back to Africa" . . . . etc.: many scenes of black as Evil . . . . etc.: the seeing of The Klansmen as a moving accumulation of photographic light, as a force of white, as triumphant good.

But "D W" paid for the next party himself: and it was the biggest personal blast in the history of film: *Intolerance.* What with Mattie's perseverance, Davidian-Billy's mechanics, and Griffithian grammar, The Muse herself couldn't help but grace the occasion with her presence. (I won't say she stayed for the whole party: but has she ever in the history of film?)

Of *Intolerance* it may be said it is the *only* virtually uncensored motion picture ever yet permitted to be seen by a large American audience: it was, as can then be easily imagined, U.S.'s *one* great Elizabethan movie moment—Griffith therefore American-Shakespeare as its maker . . . . : but *because* it was a penultimate united statement, it failed utterly as commerce in these divided states of America . . . . was the greatest commercial failure from Hollywood's entire history—was rejected by John Q. . . . . IE, US

money . . . . Public more completely than any film since: no expensive film has ever again been permitted such rejection since its economic failure: (it is, almost magically, as if it *Intolerance* embodied its theme so completely that it demonstrated it therethru its own audience rejection and, thus, commercial crucifixion—taking thereby American main sin upon itself in every theatre in the land.)

Griffith financed it himself and fought valiantly with every simplistic moral disparity of his own nature in its making—that *nothing* would be seen or could be distorted in unseeing mind, as this-side or that-side of any given question of the nature of good and evil, as thereby any excusable Cause of war . . . . other than such Accident as human nature itself through intolerable circumstance of social living. He had this one chance in his life, to stop the distortions of censorship which had ruined *The Birth of A Nation,* and to kill the temporizing platitudes of his own American power—his economic gianthood . . . . and he took it to the hilt—emasculating in this work every vestigial excuse of his successful US-ence, his powerful life.

He encouraged Billy—that wizard of oddities—to pull every trick from the bag of his mechanical genius . . . . to create images hard as irony, sling them like stones to roll down the ramp of projector light with American machine-gun rapidity and perfection of Yankee aim.

He turned every trick for-Mattie loose upon three historical facts: the fall of Babylon, the crucifixion of Christ, and the St. Bartholomew Day massacre:—dramatized these with a traditional exactitude his sister would *have* to recognize beyond all conservative glamour . . . . and intercut each with each other and his own guilt-ridden nightmarish story of American injustice—revealing the blindness of US Law as all Law before it . . . . back to, as Mattie would have it, that Romanized Greek statue-woman symbol of Justice, holding up her scales of supposed right-and-wrong—her statue eyes blind-folded-over with the lie of impartiality (this classical bitch certainly no Statue of Liberty, to him, but rather her opposite number . . . . a death-dealing woman who would legalize her sight against any such as might hold up a candle in traditional darkness—hold up a motion picture torch against all of public blindness): and yet he gave his Mattie THE happiest place, amidst these warring inter-cuts at his giant nature, of his most loving Hope . . . . cast her, played by beloved Lillian Gish, as he most often likened to remember her: the one of the 3 fatal sisters who rocks the baby/David in the cradle where Time itself is born to human conscience: and he added to this hopeful image a Whitman quote which takes on an irony in the context beyond any sentimentality intended:

. . . out of the cradle, endlessly rocking . . .

the very mothering movements inducing baby to sleep to become those frets of martial drums, sword thrusts, and man-quakes of devastation in adult human natural disaster—(for how is a war to be honestly considered as other than an 'act of nature?')

And great Griffith reduced all complexity of culture that might hide excuse for war as being Cause to the repetitional simplicity of natural law—'the powerful' preying endlessly on 'the weak,' feeding naturally on its victim as sure as wily beast on innocent flesh in any jungle . . . . except that as hyena may fatten on even lion's flesh when Death has made 'the king of the forest' victim of his own mortality . . . . as even great Babylon may fall to its victimization-of-self/betrayal-from-within—so, too, may the weak win over the giant by Luck, by that Accident all love, all life, is where each creature's own inner underdog/Death has its day at last.

David could, and did then, win this series of rounds of Baroquely edited images wherein all themes-and-repetitions counter-punted each other into a work of visual music classicism as never before, and very seldom after, in the history of film.

The *art* of the work *Intolerance* is most magnificently visible as an abstraction of light almost kin to purely musical sounds—its stories as secondary to its aesthetical nature as words in Bach's *B minor Mass,* say, or Mozartian opera, or even Wagner . . . . even Griffith's dry-as-dust fact-founding—his 'authentic' costumes and historical re-creations—pass, in the light of this film, as an American aesthetic (very much as in, say, *The Cantos* by Ezra Pound . . . . Griffith's contemporary after all . . . . whose quotes of historic documents become poetry in the contextual rhythms of the workings of the total work). One might best *see* this mastery of image by projecting *Intolerance* out-of-focus—it the first film made which would survive such treatment and hold itself up, in displays of meaningful black-white counter-shapes and developmental rhythms as the art of *integrally* is . . . . as "Art" then visible to those who otherwise—busy tracking story and/or documentation—might never see it as such (just as conservative academicians might best have first heard *The Cantos* as poetry were it in a language foreign to them.)

But it has, yet, to be seen—this film—; for it *is* so much *of* its Time and Place . . . . as all great art . . . . : and that temporal geography—20th century US—so "out of joint" and divided still against itself. Even those Americans who most *want* to look at it find themselves as-if looking straight into the sun: they naturally shade their eyes therefrom it, look at it askance, are embarrassed by what they take to be Griffith's "corniness"—all the colloquialisms and attitudes of American ease which fret the conscience of even the most 'open' viewer . . . . in a familial terror as if the

household idiot were rattling skeletons in the broom closet during Thanksgiving Dinner—all its timely Truths of national self-evidence as if causing most audiences (40-some years after its creation) to greet any projection of it with a show of hysterical laughter now and again and again and again and/or that solemnity of cautious respect wherewith one sits down on an antique or indulges a so-called "primitive" custom.

US citizens are not Elizabethans: and Hollywood products are certainly not Globe theatricals, Florentine re-birth, Noh drama, nor even old national Abbey. But dogged art will, as sure as hell, have its American day when Time and Place have become as one: David Wark Griffith's *Intolerance* is a glimmering pre-sentiment of this inevitability (was it 100, 150, years too soon—going once? . . . . going twice?—GONE! to the highest bidder, so far.)

See him, there, great David Wark Griffith, as unselfconsciously Artist as any Renaissance craftsman—(as such as Michelangelo sloshing paint on Christian ceiling and muttering curses at his Pope . . . . the man most like Mike himself in all Rome we know . . . . his alter ego Julius II—or chopping out his own marble David 17 feet tall and more terrible than any Goliath ever imagined)—oh, see him, Griffith, as all before him ever aftering . . . . (for in the Arts there is no competition—thus all who achieve the make of such are equal to all others in consideration) . . . . take heart, Viewer!—and have after his images, for all you're worth!—have at the very soul of him.

See him grown taller yet, on walls and towers of plaster Babylon, stretched out across American open roads of mechanical land-escape, stepping across Time even, in this that he called "The Sun Play of The Ages"—crossed-over into Death then, the dimension of eternity—stretched thin beyond all audience comprehension of the film—fallen, therefore, into the limbo where citizens exile every vestige of immortal sensibility . . . . broke . . . . broken. For in the United States, to be without as much money as you *had* is to be as an Egyptian mummy unwrapped—IE, lacking all means for soul's social passage even into hell.

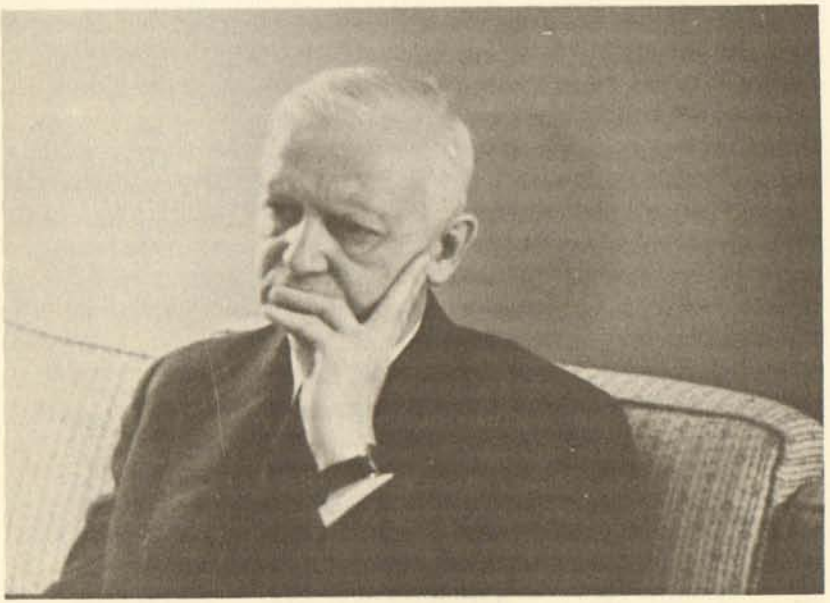
He made a few more films . . . . some of his best *in fact* . . . . trying to get back to where he had been, *and then some* (the #2 American dream) Humpty-Dumptying—but was never let "live-down" his presumption . . . . his "Intolerance" . . . . his "come-uppance" in the confessional all box-office is in the religion of show-business. He even had a fair amount of money . . . . just not as much as he *had* had . . . . and all his dreams intact—spent the rest of his days doing and undoing, like the hooves of a pole-axed bull that won't give up . . . . (married twice and twice divorced) . . . . man-

aging grace in almost every vestige of his fall—David more fully alive finally in the hermitage of his last years . . . . (at the old Knickerbocker Hotel) . . . . than ever before: —he was greatly respected, naturally . . . . (all those who fed on him were terrified of his ghost) . . . . and he was laid-to-rest, in fact, 30 years after his intolerable fall while playing (like Phaeton) with the sun at the height of its climb for him and the killer child within:—he, in his 70s now/then, had just announced his engagement to a much younger girl . . . . (shades of Mattie moving still in the shifts of life?) . . . . and was writing a film script tentatively called *Christ and Napoleon* . . . . (yes, David and Goliath again) . . . . which he wanted to film in Asia with a cast of many thousands—when he died.

Carl Theodore Dreyer

Carl Theodore Dreyer

Mme. Falconetti, from *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1925



At the time of the filming of *Gertrude*, 1964

Directing a scene in *Gertrude*

At the first performance of *Gertrude* in Paris, 1967, shortly before his death

Did you ever know a "Carl?": did you know him as 'a boy?': was he pale?—either of skin or hair . . . . were his eyebrows blond? . . . . or were they simply thin?—against white skin . . . . were his lips, perhaps, tight and his eyes of a narrowed reflectiveness?: did you know anyone, ever, at all, like Carl Theodore Dreyer?: did you ever play with a child that quietly wild; and can you really remember him?

Can you imagine him—this Carl you might once have known—born a Dane? . . . . a Danish 'laddie,' then?—oh, No! . . . . "laddie" is a term that will not, really, attach itself to a Denmark boy: it rides too trippingly upon the tongue—bespeaks a childishness of pastorality and animal fun—(Denmark too sophisticated for such simple stuff . . . . too much part of Continental Europe)—"laddie" like a run upon hills and vales more green than white . . . . (rather than the flat studious playland Danes inhabit) . . . . ah, No!—one must search another term to go with Dane, child or man. Though there *are* Danish children—(and though both Swedes and Norwegians go to Denmark most to play . . . . to be a child, again, on winter's holiday)—can *a Dane* be "child?" . . . . or must he, young Carl, be definitively "boy"—a Danish *boy*, when young? . . . . must he be considered that kind of cultural prelude to the specificity of Man?: in the late 19th century Denmark of our imagination . . . . (of the latitude of "laddie," but far too level and levelheaded for that) . . . . yes!—I think he *must* be so-considered: boy Dane, then—Carl!

Is there any area of our consideration which will *not* be (as St Paul would have the language of it, lacking face) "through a glass darkly?": can we play with him, Carl then, in anything akin to his natural habitat? I think not!—think on the mists of Denmark . . . . think onto "Hamlet" (there being *nothing* other in the English language to prepare us for this game with him): but let us play anyway (like Swedes on holiday)—move our minds through mists and ice and urgency of quickened summer crops and thick religiosity and sin-as-fun . . . . stolid fogs and fierce bright want: let us try a game of hop-scotch in this severe climate of most foreign (almost Russian) field of playful thought—for the mind of Carl will naturally skip and jump, as if to fool and warm itself, in just exactly the way the eye will shift when confronted by a landscape almost completely flat and white with snow or wheat . . . . in zig-zags, as skier . . . . with cross-country skier . . . . with leaps as silently sudden as avalanching snow—off roof or tree.

But let me warn—before the game . . . . we have not dealt with the prime fact yet of Carl's make-up—that he was an artist . . . . a late 19th century Danish boy who was to grow up to be an artist: the game, then, is a deadly one—sure, as Life itself, to end in Death! Can we play with that?—if not, then best to quit . . . . before the downhill race begins . . . . before the "Theodore" of his name intrudes upon *his* living—and, then, yours.

Carl Theodore Dreyer—blond Teutonic boy (gray mist's light) with fairest skin (rubbed red from fire within) and thinnest features (taut with stance) and sharpest eyes (ice) imaginable . . . . ah *eyes!*—what shall we think of eyes like that?

(Let me present you now and again with pieces of a puzzle written by Carl's fellow countryman, Hans Christian Andersen, who'd died just a few years before Carl was, in 1889, born: to begin then, this "First Story" of *The Snow Queen,* which must surely have been read to young Carl again and again: imagine him listening this first time, in the year of our myth of him, to the true history of his own damnation—the account of the stitch of the net that trapped him before his birth . . . . the key to the lock of his childhood Fate and all that was to follow naturally after):

("Now we are about to begin and you must attend! And when we get to the end of the story, you will know more than you do now about a very wicked hobgoblin. He was one of the worst kind; in fact he was a real demon.

("One day this demon was in a high state of delight because he had invented a mirror with this peculiarity: that every good and pretty thing reflected in it shrank away to almost nothing. On the other hand, every bad and good-for-nothing thing stood out and looked its worst. The most beautiful landscapes reflected in it looked like boiled spinach, and the best people became hideous, or else they were upside down and had no bodies. Their faces were distorted beyond recognition, and if they had even one freckle it appeared to spread all over the nose and mouth. The demon thought this immensely amusing. If a good thought passed through anyone's mind, it turned to a grin in the mirror, and this caused real delight to the demon.

("All the pupils in the demon's school—for he kept a school—reported that a miracle had taken place: now for the first time, they said, it was possible to see what the world and mankind were really like. They ran about everywhere with the mirror, till at last there was not a country or a person which had not been seen in this distorting mirror.

("They even wanted to fly up to heaven with it to mock the angels. But the higher they flew the more it grinned, so much so that they could hardly hold it. And at last it slipped out of their hands and fell to the earth, shivered into hundreds of millions and billions of bits. Even then it did more harm than ever. Some of these bits were not as big as a grain of sand, and these flew about all over the world, getting into people's eyes. Once in, they stuck there and distorted everything they looked at, or made them see everything that was amiss. Each tiniest grain of glass kept the

same power as that possessed by the whole mirror. Some people even got a bit of the glass into their hearts, and that was terrible for the heart became like a lump of ice. Some of the fragments were so big that they were used for windowpanes, but it was not advisable to look at one's friends through these panes. Other bits were made into spectacles, and it was a bad business when people meaning to be just put on these spectacles.

("The bad demon laughed till he split his sides! It tickled him to see the mischief he had done. But some of these fragments were still left floating about the world, and you shall hear what happened to them.")

Young Carl (variation of "Karl," Scandinavian for "Charles," being Germanic name meaning "man of the common people") listening to Hans—feeling the call of the language in his bones, knowing the beat of the rhythmns of it in his heart . . . . sensing, in owl-like childishness, himself as a part of all this and yet apart—feeling his elf-self as a possible demon . . . . sensing, in common, himself as victim—young Carl . . . . Theodore (from the Greek, meaning "gift of God") emerging in him—self as such . . . . stuff as heroes are made of—: had he been named Theodore Carl Dreyer, he might have become a Hero, killed in some war or other . . . . : as it was, he became an artist—"Man of the common people" *first* . . . . "gift of God" as an afterthought of his parents which he took *upon* himself: in some high school Greek lesson later, he certainly determined the full spell of his name for announcement ever after: Carl *Theodore* Dreyer: full measure of his meaning.

For he was a pre-destined Man, as any male Dane—and a particular Man, as none before him nor any after . . . . and a meticulous Man, beyond every belief of his upbringing—beyond any article of faith that might have given object to his sub-zeroing-in on himself . . . . oh, yes!, he was to be "The" Dreyer—as well as any given "Carl" . . . . search-out the demon-of-himself—as well as the "Kay" (of the Hans Christian story of the little Kay and Gerda, boy and girl of the Andersen puzzle)/(as well as Kafka searched-out *his* "K" through "Trial" and "Castilian" nightmare) . . . . and search-out "The Snow Queen" herself in the iciest habitat of his imagination of witchiest woman—as well as, finally, Gerda girl herself/himself's femalian being at the end of his life, when he made *Gertrude*—a show-biz drama by fellow Scandinavian (novelist and playwright Soderberg)—into the greatest play-of-light ever to focus upon the fret of woman's love, upon the keys and stops of orgiastic damnation.

(For those of you who *think* you do not know the story—listen a bit again to Hans . . . .):

("Kay and Gerda were looking at a picture book of birds and animals one day—it had just struck five by the church clock—when Kay said, 'Oh! Something struck my heart and I have something in my eye.'

("The little girl put her arms around his neck. He blinked his eye, but there was nothing to be seen.

(" 'I believe it is gone,' he said, but it was not gone. It was one of those very grains of glass from the mirror, the magic mirror. You remember that horrid mirror in which all good and great things reflected in it became small and mean, while the bad things were magnified and every flaw became very apparent.

("Poor Kay! A grain of it had gone straight to his heart and would soon turn it to a lump of ice. He did not feel it any more but it was still there.

(" 'Why do you cry?' he asked. 'It makes you look ugly. There's nothing the matter with me. How horrid!' he suddenly cried. 'There's a worm in that rose, and that one is quite crooked. After all, they are nasty roses and so are the boxes they are growing in!' He kicked the box and broke off two of the roses.

(" 'What are you doing, Kay?' cried the little girl. When he saw her alarm, he broke off another rose, and then ran in by his own window and left dear little Gerda alone.")

Carl Theodore Dreyer became, first, a journalist—and he raked his share of muck with Denmark's best of them . . . . flinging verbal mud with abandon any young man can assume who has come to himself as 'the news' in the safe repetitions of daily papers—wonderful, to him, how 'The Cause' occludes to journalism's language . . . . inasmuch as its style of writ pretends an impartiality—a lack of all personal sense of "be", as in *be*fore 'the cause,' *be*cause, etc. (all journalism, thus, is 'ghost-writ' . . . . as if no human had ever touched the words of any such as is known as 'the report'—*shots*, therefore, in the dark of letters utterly immoral in every stance that makes them fit for newspaper print) . . . . oh, yes!, young Carl's greatest delight—this shift of columns of blackest thought!

To fellow newsmen, he was of course simply "Carl"—or perhaps "young Dreyer" . . . . one cannot have a "Theodore," after *all*, in a newspaper office . . . . think of the jokes such plume-of-name would engender there: and Carl was not to remain content with journalistic thought—not more than a couple years . . . . by 1912 he was writing scenarios and editing films—(for he did certainly intend to 'grow-up') . . . . (and all journalists must remain adolescent-at-heart!)

See the instant in which *he* saw the moving image as impartial fact . . . . as immoral a 'black-*on*-white' as any imagined newspaper truth: (for if you suppose—as he did then—the camera to be a reporter of life, then its record of any event on columns of cellu-

loid becomes journalism's ultimate dream: :the report of a machine). To write, therefore, what the machine *will* report, and to edit, after, its strips of so-called "reality" . . . . very much as any news editor arranges his paper . . . . and to see it run its f'act-of-life as if for the first time in darkened auditorium—as if it/act had just happened . . . . as *in* fact it had—oh! . . . . this was to fly in the face of heaven—and/or to come close to being God.

But cinema as medium offered Carl more 'growth-up' than any making-of-news *or* mimic-of-heaven—for film is a Jacob's-ladder that moves through Time as well as Space . . . . (think of the difference between the verbs "record" and "report") . . . . : a motion picture is, as it were, a *record*—vibrates beyond any verb . . . . beyond any such as might be called a *report:* for any 'movie,' once shown, can be shown again in the light of itself's as-if fact—an eventuality as if it were, as it ran again and again, eternity's drum . . . . unreeling itself in a spin of hypnotic dream—a *be*seeming, then, as real as the *inner* life of any man: and this was, as entertainment, a "grin" wide enough to take the whole world in . . . . until it shattered for him in his "30th year to heaven"—when he wrote and then also *directed* his first film: *The President:* and became the master of facial mime: :he who makes the faces of others his own . . . . who makes them him/he them—IE: when he became "the mirror" itself, in his innermost being.

(As Hans had said):

("When his grandmother told them stories he always had a *but*—. And if he could manage it, he liked to get behind her chair, put on her spectacles, and imitate her. He did it very well and people laughed at him. He was soon able to imitate everyone in the street. He could make fun of all their peculiarities and failings. 'He will turn out a clever fellow,' said people . . . . He played quite different games now; he seemed to have grown older.")

Now—understand this, please. . . . : a journalist discovering the term "to be" and attaching it to his sense of "cause"—a journalist discovering eternity . . . . : this was Carl Theodore Dreyer directing his first actor's features to fit those of his innermost self: this was the beginning of morality for him in his search for Truth—as opposed to any news sense of Fact . . . . his making a 'cause' *his*—as opposed to serving any "The Cause."

(Every journalist must serve first 'The Cause' of Fact when he pretends to write "objectively," as it's called—when he pretends, therefore, his act were guided by the hand of an impartial god . . . . tends to a poker-face-type, hiding every trick in the newspaper game.)

Dreyer came, via journeyman film, to the end of all such 'sameness' as would comfort Man—as Bibles and newspapers do—and found himself torn apart . . . . as you will, too, if you see—as he

saw—that map of hell and heavenly grace all "flesh is heir to" in any visage . . . . that "marriage of Heaven and Hell" possible in any humanly moving face.

But what do we mean—what did he—when we call a movie actor or actress "a star?" . . . . a face of light!—most surely that!—but *what?*/what's 'star-like' in that? . . . . if not to make a crystalline fire of feature? . . . . if not to turn all flesh of it to a burn of ice?—to freeze the animal shifts of all such feature into some perfection-of-thought—to turn the reflected world itself into a mask's hat.

(As Hans would have Kay have it):

("In the evening when little Kay was at home and half undressed, he crept up onto the chair by the window and peeped out of the little hole. A few snowflakes were falling, and one of these, the biggest, remained on the edge of the window box. It grew bigger and bigger, till it became the figure of a woman dressed in the finest white gauze, which appeared to be made of millions of starry flakes. She was delicately lovely, but all ice—glittering, dazzling ice. Still she was alive. Her eyes shone like two bright stars, but there was no rest or peace in them. She nodded to the window and waved her hand. The little boy was frightened and jumped down off the chair . . . .")

Is it any wonder that Dreyer—young Fact-foundry that he'd been—should turn . . . . in Truth . . . . to the films of Griffith for inspiration: he patterned his next film—*Leaves From The Book of Satan*—after Griffith's *Intolerance* . . . .: but it was a mistake to think he could emulate this American. It was only as writer that Dreyer felt inspired by Griffith's ideals—to get *at* Truth, to 'dog' and 'worry' it through quotes of Fact . . . . Historical Fact, as it happened in Griffith's imagination—an altogether different matter than 'God's' Truth as a newspaper-man might see it.

Think of him, Carl Theodore, reading Marie Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan*—his eyes, those 'blues' of sight that graced his face with immediate advertisement of all his inner sorrow—those eyes of his then, shifting across this text that might have been writ by "The Snow Queen" herself in irony and pity of The Devil's plight: . . . . the fight to win the unpredictable soul of man.—: "Poor Devil" . . . . the pity any woman might have for a fallen angel or man, half-masked in the prose-of-her by an iron smile of Christian train-of-thought, Christianity's sure-of-itself charity for 'the heathen,' 'the weak'—"poor Devil" said, therefore, very much as a mother might fondly damn her son . . . . before teaching him—as she'd been trained-to-do—the 'error of his ways,' the price he'd pay for all such fault . . . . as any pride in him she'd love—and as that "pride goeth before a fall." Think of Dreyer then reading this woman's text and imagining himself as her Devil's-child-pitied-thinking of 'Daddy' Griffith/Historical Fact in

motion pic. . . . . imagining himself, Carl Theodore Dreyer, mending "error of his ways" with moral-movie-tract of *Intolerance*—thinking of himself as Denmark's Griffith. See him, therefore, writing scenario of Marie's book in the darkest hours of his Danish night—feverish with all thought of bringing mother and father together again in him . . . . The Devil himself gone moral in heaven's hellish marriage—as he wrote the script 'first person,' Devil speaking, and titled it: *Leaves From The Book of Satan.*

It failed in motion—emotionally failed from scratch . . . . naturally—inasmuch as he/Dreyer was *not* The Devil, nor in any way demonic . . . . and discovered that, surely first time in his living, by making this film: (the world of movie-goers hasn't discovered that yet of him . . . . still thinks of Dreyer as 'satanic'): failed, then (with them)—inasmuch as he was not simply Carl, nor "The Snow Queen" either . . . . though he'd be struggling to think of himself as such till the end of his life—inasmuch as he was also not, in any sense, David Wark Griffith.

Carl Theodore Dreyer took four Marie stories, made them his own in Devil's tongue, but could in *no*-wise bring himself to cut them up, intercut them, or in any way reduce their verbal sense to visual fact—as Griffith had done . . . . (for Griffith took Fact to be Myth—as in History it IS): Dreyer's film ends-up as an as-if 'interview' of old Satan himself, who as usual lies in his eye-teeth . . . . (and, as is the value of all 'interview,' the film only tells what The Devil is *not*—not, for instance, Carl Theodore Dreyer—certainly not!)

In all Carl's work of these early years there is a moral fable which prompts his prose—each piece of journal writ twists itself around a stance which even haunts his later films . . . . it is, to-wit: :that 'the old' suppress 'the young'—'the dead' 'the living'—'institutions' 'Man'—'duty' 'love'—etc.: it is of no importance whatsoever in consideration of the artist Carl Theodore Dreyer . . . . nor, thus, of any importance, either, in consideration of the man he was! It, as all stance, hardened his heart—yes!—and 'steeled' his eyes; but it did not touch the soul of him . . . . nor any knowing of the world in him as he grew up. It was "prosaic" in the fullest sense of the word—the 'hang-up' of a writer who read . . . . as he did . . . . too many newspapers, novels, and current plays—too much of news, novelties and currencies adrift in his Psyche to enable him to budge the mental needle off any crack in the record. The Poet of him found release in language of vision—paid *no* attention to the thoughts of The Writer . . . . except to dance upon whatever stage he'd thought to provide . . . . to play upon whatever frets and stops his fussed consciousness could manage . . . . and finally to transform all such plotting, as The Writer might be-think, into a being of pure vision—a visual poetics beyond comprehension.

The first-such work where the eyes had-it—above all negation . . . . beyond all 'literachuring' in him—was "Jeanne D'Arc": : *The Passion of Joan of Arc.*

He was almost 40 years old; and he'd made enough films, successfully moving, to be famous throughout Europe: Carl Theodore Dreyer—top Dane . . . . movie man—was brought to Paris to film the life of St. Joan in nationalistic commemoration of the 500th anniversary of her death by fire. Was ever any choice more happily ironic than this?—that Denmark's somber newspaper film-maker should be chosen, above all others, to 'cover' the trial and martyrdom of History's iciest queen at stake . . . . Joan the *one* woman in all West's tradition to claim and win her *own* place in the heaven of everyone's imagining . . . . oh yes!—she's without a doubt queen of the highest throne the world has yet granted Woman.

Can you see him, Carl, searching the features of hundreds of actresses—roaming the streets of Paris—attending salons—ranging all 'twenties' France in his desperate search for her, the Joan of his wildest imagination . . . . searching for living woman whose features could 'star' as this witch he'd perfectly make her?

Much has *been made* of his final choice: a dance-hall girl at the peak of her sexy fame in Parisian fashion: :Marie—yes, a Marie again!—Marie Falconetti: (one would have to say today "Brigitte Bardot" to approximate the effect of Marie's name of that time). Most, naturally, thought that choice the maddest caprice—a publicity stunt, perhaps . . . . : but it was not any such as that at all—(nor any such 'satanism' as movie-goers still like to imagine of him/Dreyer): it happened thus:

Poor Carl/"poor Devil" (in the sense he felt himself cursed or magically unworthy for the holy task "D'Arc," that he could not find an actress in all France who would 'do' for "Joan") had announced he would not, could not, make the film; and he was 'packed' for a return to Denmark (in all humility—such as Parisian sophistication itself can engender in a country-man . . . . such as he, Carl, must have been made-to feel each 'salon' he'd entered—each French film studio too—in his search . . . . poor 'country' Carl) when—lo and behold! . . . . in a magazine he was idly thumbing through—he saw the fashionable face of Falconetti and immediately said (like any king who's found his maid . . . . or the foot glass slipper fits upon . . . . or perfect feature): she's the one/that's It!—I'll have her and none other. As I said, much has 'been made' as gossip of his choice: (none till now have thought to look at the likeness between Marie's features and Dreyer's own): Carl found himself, thus, in a fashion magazine; and as Theodore, chose himself to play with himself in the deadliest game of all: the hermaphrodite's game . . . . played as always, to tortured end—Death itself by fire, for sure!

It was arranged that he and she would meet. When he said what he wanted, she thought him 'mad'—she laughed at him . . . . she teased him some in the current fashion, in front of the others: but Carl, who'd after all now found himself, was not to be 'put-off' by The Salon: he asked to see her alone: they went into a tiny room: he promised her sex—natch . . . . as she had that reputation of "nymph" which passes these days as "maniac"—he promised her that and God-knows what-all else besides; he promised her the moon—the sky . . . . all heaven—as any lover; he proposed immortality even: even he could not remember what-all he promised her: and twenty minutes after the door shut them apart from the others, she accepted his proposal and agreed to play "Jeanne D'Arc" for him ever after: several days after film shooting began, the men he'd hired for her every pleasure were dismissed by her . . . . she'd become by then that much Saint . . . . : when all the photography was done, she/Marie retired to a mad-house and spent most of the rest of her life faithful to him, being Joan.

He was faithful to her, too, in every way he was able: he took her text, Joan's—the transcript of her trial—and loosed his visual Poet from all writ's task . . . . cast poet Antonin Artaud as her, Joan's only friend among all other actors of her martyrdom; he directed the trial in her, Joan's, defense with a will never seen in film before—exhibiting every shift of her face, each agony of transformation of her with a passion only possible to the truest lover . . . . doting on each feature and slightest change of expression; he lovingly set her face in the purest filmic light—composed such frames as film's are truly made-of . . . . compositions which lead all eye to the expectancy of movement (rather than to the whole of some static image, as in painting)—yes!, he unbalanced whole hierarchies of compositional law . . . . in order to guide all eyes to every facial detail of her, Marie's, transformation, Joan's; he loved her "to death" like they say—and gave her/him immortality.

He would, and very nearly did, have it perfect for her . . . . each half-inch of light . . . . each 35mm frame cut to perfection—ah yes!, The Editor in him even did his dance at the last.

(As Hans would have it of him):

(" 'Now look through the glass, Gerda!' he said. Every snowflake was magnified and looked like a lovely flower or a sharply-pointed star.

(" 'Do you see how cleverly they are made?' said Kay. 'Much more interesting than looking at real flowers and there is not a flaw in them. They are perfect. If only they would not melt!' ")

And The Poet of him, up against all that 'writer's cramp' of "reality," would drive her crazy—to insanity wherein "the real" is once again what-you-make-it . . . . just as it became for Artaud

when The Poet within him drove him to a madhouse several years later—(as was the case with many poets up against all such sickness of those Times as took "the news" as "the real": :"the new" as 'the new': :"real" as 'real': :etc.)

See him, Carl, threatening to actually cut off all Marie's lovely hair—her crying for "real" then, in threat of shears—him, Carl, castrating himself/her, Joan: watch him, Theodore, actually setting the fire under her, Joan . . . . Marie's terror for "real" . . . . flames burning her again and again in film's endless ritual beyond Time's measure: watch, therefore—with incredible care—this most contemporary man, this Dreyer . . . . the terrible clockwork of him vaulting heavenward with burning poet wings—this moth whirl of thought about the moving picture light: it is your inevitable flight of The Times as well as his/hers: :Marie's/Joan's—whose fates were inextricably beyond him . . . . he but the boy/Carl who struck the match—the gift of God: she but the queen bee of all 19th century societal hive—she but the victim of her own illusion . . . . not his . . . . not Joan's—dead these 500 years thank God! . . . . as she did: she/Marie, as Joan or any other she would play—in hopes of soul?—as powerless as a flake of snow.

(" 'Look! The white bees are swarming,' said the old grandmother.

(" 'Have they a queen bee too?' asked the little boy, for he knew that there was a queen among the real bees.

(" 'Yes, indeed they have,' said the grandmother. 'She flies where the swarm is thickest. She is the biggest of them all and she never remains on the ground. She always flies up again to the sky. Many a winter's night she flies through the streets and peeps in at the windows, and then the ice freezes on the panes into wonderful patterns like flowers.'

(" 'Oh yes, we have seen that,' said both children, and then they knew it was true.

(" 'Can the Snow Queen come in here?' asked the little girl.

(" 'Just let her come,' said the boy, 'and I will put her on the stove, where she will melt.' ")

Carl Theodore Dreyer wishing that when it was over it was over and done!—that when it was undone it was-to-be clearly undone . . . . as in Romanticism—that when it was finished it was polished to show every grain-of-Truth underneath the surface . . . . as is so in all Baroque—that when it was there it was there-to-stay in absolute schism from Reality . . . . as in Classicism—in ultimate Eternity, then, now/then . . . . as is 'a classic's' way: poor Dreyer then when 'stuck with' film: :a medium ephemeral as its name: :a veil of light (aflame in his *Jeanne D'Arc*). In his next film *(Vampyr)* he 'went for' something more Baroque: :smoke—seeking something more solid than Joan . . . . the

white-*white*-WHITE of his adoration of her which had driven him mad: oh, she/Marie got the realistic brunt of it all right!: but he too suffered 'no end' of madness . . . . as is the case in all such worship of woman—he too never again entirely sane after Joan . . . . on-and-off in asylum again and again, the rest of his life: but he had a hope so to speak—"a prayer," like they say . . . . a chance to succeed himself where all others had failed—to 'turn back the clock' of all such romantic thought as would hatch a saint or a movie star . . . . to *un*do all adoration of witch as was in him—of woman herself.

(He felt this way about it, as Hans once put it, to be sure!):

(" 'Are you still cold?' she asked and kissed him on the forehead. Ugh! it was colder than ice. It went to his very heart, which was already more than half ice. He felt as if he were dying, but only for a moment, and then it seemed to have done him good. He no longer felt the cold. . . .

(" 'Now I mustn't kiss you any more,' she said, 'or I should kiss you to death!'

("Kay looked at her and she was so pretty! A cleverer, more beautiful face could hardly be imagined. She did not seem to be made of ice now, as she was when she waved her hand to him from outside the window. In his eyes she was quite perfect, and he was not a bit afraid of her. He told her that he could do mental arithmetic as far as fractions, and that he knew the number of square miles and the number of inhabitants of the country. She always smiled at him, and he then thought that he surely did not know enough; and he looked up into the wide expanse of heaven, into which they rose higher and higher as she flew with him on a dark cloud, while the storm surged around them, the wind ringing in their ears like well-known old songs.")

Thus next, then, he turned to legends of horrors grown old out of middle-European folklore and given romantic focus in Sheridan le Fanu's book: *In a Glass Darkly:* yes!—in St Paul's literary metaphor we begin to see, as he saw, all thought of Vampire (creature who'll reflect in no *visual* mirror) take shape through story . . . . take shape in the night of Dreyer's mind as photographic smoke—as that part of the film's emulsion *un*exposed to light—that part the laboratory can*not* develop into anything *but* a solid shape . . . . a 'cut-out' lacking all details of life-likeness . . . . all recognizable feature—that part of all photography that gets hypo'ed at the Lab to an absolute . . . . 'fixed,' therefore 'eternity' as a 'blank' . . . . moving shades of something interfering with all light—shades of black: even this, in the making of the film, he would contradict—there being no absolute dark anywhere throughout *Vampyr* . . . . only tendencies toward any such—shades of photo-smoke, mists, blacks-of-dress, shadows, underexposures

of all object . . . . every subjective detail as-if 'about-to-be' crowded-out by encroaching dark . . . . each recognizable object subject to the continual *threat* of black—all image, then/therefore, obscure as folklore itself and/or any literary description of, say, "evil" . . . . IE: what can only exist in the mind of man . . . . what cannot be seen: he'd photograph invisibility then—and he did!

His every move in the make of this film was contradiction—contrary to The Writer in himself, 'the reporter'/'recorder' even: he'd *not* get at Fact (as a journalist might) or at Truth either, but rather (as Film-maker) get at Untruth's absolute power over both mind and material body: this film would be . . . . as it is! . . . . a journalist's Black Mass (opposite, thus, to all other 'spook movies' in the history of film, inasmuch as they seek with every dramatic 'trick in the bag' to engender Belief in the news-reality of some monster or other—some super-nature, as only the 'realism' of moving pictures can seem-to-be—whereas Dreyer's *Vampyr* is a parody of "Belief" itself . . . . thus pure blasphemy against camera-as-God from beginning to end).

Its other title: *The Strange Adventures of David Gray,* gives us true sense, at start, of the mock-of-hero intended—as much as to say: "the adventures of Mr. Blur" or "Blah" . . . . "David Non-entity" then—common man as colorless creature . . . . or simply creature-of-film's dulled emulsion: he even spelled "vampire": :"v* a*m*p*y*r"—to set his symbol-of-evil apart from all other.

Almost all 'actors' in the film were 'amateurs'—only the old master-vampire and his feminine-victim (turned vampire then, too) were 'professionals' in any dramatic sense. David Gray, his common-man-hero; was Baron de Gunzburg, exiled Russian aristocrat (*un*common enough to end-up, years later, senior editor of *Vogue*): Carl found him, his blasphemy's hero, at a Count's masquerade ball in 1929 Paris—picked him that night for the part. For 'the wickedest woman' of the story's plot, he picked a "sweet old lady" as everyone knew her—for his 'heroine' . . . . a "bitch," by everyone's account. Do you begin to see how it went?

For cameraman of this fantasy, he chose France's best 'realist'-such: Rudolf Maté: who'd worked with him on 'Joan'—"cinematographer *par excellence,*" as it's called . . . . then stuck his lenses in an endless fog—directed every shot to look as crude as 'home movies' would: he insisted each object, from chateau to grave, be *real* . . . . even the vampire book in the film, authentic . . . . , then slanted every sight to give the sense each prop was phony as Hell—lighted every scene to make them look as-if composed-of studio 'flats.' All evening shots were photographed at dawn: :*etcetera*: :vice-versa triumphant!

The sound-track, added later to make this his first 'talky'-movie, contradicted itself too: human speech, unnecessary to its

'silent' movie plot, often degenerated into animal grunts—emotional sound-effects . . . . as when the master-vampire (supposed by horror-movie audiences to be immortal) *dies,* smothered by grain (a trick stolen from Griffith's *A Corner In Wheat*) muttering: "I don't want to die!" in such a way that the language degenerates into a series of desperate 'barks' as the white wheat covers him up: "Arg - rarh - rargh - a - rah!" Whereas the background of human converse on the track is continually pierced by animal cries—cock crows, barking dogs, parrot shrieks, etc. . . . . these done by professional imitators—human beings imitating such sounds in the recording studio (and sounding as such to any listening ear).

Oh!—the film was clearly made *not* to 'scare' . . . . but *rather* to reward all attention to it (as never before or after in the history of the horror film) with 'awareness' of the whole bag of superstition's tricks—each act an obvious 'fake,' carrying the antidote to any 'belief' in it in its 'pun' upon itself . . . . as when the 'heroine,' already vampire-bit, wakes up to smile at her sister and then broadens her smile to include her fangs (the film's most frightening shot, and its most 'acted' one, thus a pun upon love's want—*not,* in any sense, superstition's fright) . . . . or, for instance, when the hero is encoffined and the camera takes his place for spectator's first-person ride to the grave, all 'identification' with David Gray (such as would have made the scene 'scary' for identifying audiences) is deliberately 'tossed-away' by Dreyer—lost in an intellectual play with David's 'double' (*super*-imposition) stepping aside to watch you/(camera)/him in a tomb (obviously) of the imagination.

The game of this film is rich with a wit like this:

I met a man upon the stair . . .
A little man who wasn't there.
He wasn't there again today.
I wish to Hell he'd go away.

Thus *Vampyr* is one of the greatest comedies ever filmically made—its humor as sweet as a nursery rhyme . . . . and as terrifying, too—a smile with fangs (but certainly no 'horror film' as commerce would have it: everyone scared half-to-death in ritual belief—thus caught in endless repetition . . . . stuck for endless tickets at theatre door, church door, newspaper's more-and-more terror) oh!, No!—*Vampyr* is an end-in-itself . . . . if you can but see it as such—if you can but see it as he made it beautifully be!

He did essentially the same thing, a decade later, for *Day of Wrath* and *Ordet*—exposing Christianity's witch-tricks in the former and the magic spell of Christian see-er in the latter . . . . both based on dramatic plays of a conventional Scandanavian nature, yet as Baroque as *Vampyr* in their filmic make-up—as 'nursery rhyming' in their visual terror. All three can, I think, best be seen as-if made by Hans Christian Andersen as a 20th century filmmaker (that perilous charm of Hans would certainly have come to this if he had been born fifty years later . . . . this Christian who yearned to be an opera star, 'settled-for' novelist's fame, and got stuck finally as literary baby-sitter—which he *was* best-at), as Carl "gift of God" Dreyer yearning to be top moralist, settling for 'entertainer,' got stuck with Art—poor contemporary bastard!

He'd show Art then what a 'wooden-nickel' It is in his *Day of Wrath*—each scene of it shot in blatant imitation of Dutch 'religious' and 'genre' painting . . . . from Rembrandt to the worst of them—he chased his 17th century Danish witches through a veritable museum of black & white Holland art . . . . a *mise en scène* that said "art-*art-ART*" at every camera turn—and burned this "Dies Irae" witch at a protestant stake . . . . wherat she found no hope of heavenly saving grace, nor any later sainthood either: that these scenes of religious 'quackery' occur in the chiaroscuro of Rembrandt's and Vermeer's domain—and are thus composed of painterly sacredness . . . . these scenes wherein even an *un*tortured witch's confession, at end, is a 'fake'—does make its Black Mass a blaspheme against aesthetics . . . . as he meant it—does expose the whole paintpot as the trap, of sensibility, it is as sure as church: (you have but to look at the 'stills' of this film, and remember that Carl's an *original* man), to realize the terrible parody going-on herein: (yet if none have so-seen this film's nursery pun upon Art it is because all eyes of this Time are so-trapped in it/Art-as-church).

Ordet, meaning "The Word," came several years after: and the camera of Carl Theodore Dreyer took an opposite stance: all scene was sparse, as he would have it ('home movies' again as in *Vampyr*—but with a vengeance, a stillness) . . . . language having its "day of wrath" and blessings (the parody that this portrait of a seer and his surroundings, should, could only, occur in a world of words almost totally devoid of visual Visions)—the religious sense Kierkegaardian . . . . the director's eye a slightly shifting guiding-sight which leads all thought to: "The Word": :"belief": which finally pulls-off the oldest trick-in-the-trade of speech: raises 'the dead.'

Oh God, old Dreyer, half-mad, 'pulling your leg,' plucking-the-sleeve, finally leading all sensibility by the camera hand—street-walker Carl . . . . poor beggar—sweet child: Carl Theodore Dreyer growing old—trapped beyond his own wrathful thought by perfection's wish . . . . by the need of money to fulfill it—by Art, thus: tough 'old bird' in his mind . . . . making the most childish fables, Grim gruesome, come visually true, to even a happy ending—in *Ordet*—as Hans Christian Andersen would have had it:

("He went about dragging some sharp flat pieces of ice which he placed in all sorts of patterns, trying to make something out of them . . . .

("Kay's patterns were most ingenious, because they were the 'Ice Puzzles of Reason.' In his eyes they were excellent and of the greatest importance: this was because of the grain of glass still in his eye. He made many patterns forming words, but he never could find the right way to place them for one particular word, a word he was most anxious to make. It was 'Eternity.' The Snow Queen had said to him that if he could find out this word he should be his own master, and she would give him the whole world and a new pair of skates. But he could not not discover it.")

He hardly knew himself anymore what he was after . . . . anymore than as a child quite lost in play—so given-over to the game, the art, as to scare himself yet laugh: (but audiences never saw the *humor* anymore than adults see the irony of serious children).

Dreyer finally came to want to 'do' "The Life of Christ"—came to The U.S. and asked President Truman, at a Washington cocktail party, for a million dollars (or was it someone other, among the hundreds he insisted must help him? . . . . was it more than a million he'd asked-for?)—because The United States was World's foremost Christian nation (or was it because The U.S. was The Kingdom of The Jews in his imagination? . . . . or just because it was the richest country on earth?)—and then he'd said he wanted to film it in Jerusalem (was that Arab? . . . . or Israelian?)—and he wanted, yes, to film it in eternal Jerusalem . . . . and he ended his U.S. trip in a mad-house—went back to Denmark without a penny.

Years passed: and most forgot Carl Theodore Dreyer: for awhile, it was rumored, he was a bar-tender: but *he* didn't believe it: and then came *Gertrude,* 'out of the blue' of his legend: and he achieved with it/her/"Gertrude" the classic his whole life was made-for—achieved "classicism" at last in film, of *all* mediums . . . . (in the sense Donald Sutherland defines "classicism," thus: "Classicism is based on presence. It does not consider that it has come or that it will go away; it merely proposes to be there where it is. It is; or, like God, so it affirms"): to make a work-of-art that can be defined as such, can simply *be,* then, were surely more than one might expect of Hans Christian Andersen in any form of him: yet Hans it was who predicted exactly how it might happen to "Kay"—foretold for Carl then, the way in which it finally did in his thus predestined living:

("Kay sat quite alone in all those many miles of empty ice halls. He looked at his bits of ice and thought and thought, till something gave way within him. He sat so stiff and immovable that one might have thought he was frozen to death.

("Then it was that little Gerda walked into the palace, through the great gates in a biting wind. She said her evening prayer, and the wind dropped as if lulled to sleep, and she walked on into the big empty hall. She saw Kay and knew him at once. She flung her arms round his neck, his neck, held him fast, and cried, 'Kay, little Kay, have I found you at last?'

("But he sat still, rigid and cold.

("Then little Gerda shed hot tears. They fell upon his breast and penetrated to his heart. Here they thawed the lump of ice and melted the little bit of the mirror which was in it. He looked at her, and she sang.")

He thought, when he began *Gertrude,* he was taking on all *Culture* in this film for paradoxical play (as he had *Art* in 'Day's Wrath' and all-such folk-*Belief* via language as "In the beginning was The Word" as in *Ordet*)—specifically intended the whole Culture trap of turn-of-the-century Stockholm to be sprung, herein this adaptation of a play written then to a perfect visibility . . . . (he wished, for instance, to make it in color and have as consultant Adolf Hallman who'd published a book called *The Stockholm Society* in 1910); and he was, from scratch, after that sense of Culture as *conscious* habit (as Ezra Pound defines Culture as what's left after you've forgot what you set out to learn): but "Gertrude" herself (or was it the ghost of Maria von Platen, after whom the play's 'heroine' was patterned?) entered the heart of his thought; and she 'stole the show' from him, through him, as surely as if she were living woman; and she stopped all parody in him—all morality even . . . . made him *love* her beyond any critical measure—made *Gertrude,* the film of her, the greatest declaration of love of woman in the history of the medium.

(It is, perhaps, almost impossible for most to know how an artist may love a woman of his imagination as physically as if he were in touch with her flesh—she having 'a life of her own' acting upon him, as surely as if she were moving in a world outside his mind . . . . this being the exact state of all creative activity in him—The Muse herself, The Queen of this domain . . . . not him, Man, certainly not!—except as he loves Her: yet each human being shares this same Myth with every infatuation . . . . most simply unable to admit it—too terrible this fact that "one's true love" can-*not* be other than one's own thought always desperately adjusting to flesh, always caught in the cultural trap of one's own habitual loneliness: The Artist sometimes breaks-out of such habit as all "flesh is heir to" by letting the woman of his imagination—his Muse—have a life of her own IN him . . . . and ever after, then . . . . for all Eternity.):

("He kept tight hold of Gerda, who laughed and cried for joy. Their happiness was so heavenly that even the bits of ice danced

for joy around them. And when they settled down, there they lay in just the very position the Snow Queen had told Kay he must find out, if he was to become his own master and have the whole world and a new pair of skates.

("Gerda kissed his cheeks and they grew rosy. She kissed his eyes and they shone like hers. She kissed his hands and his feet and he became well and strong. The Snow Queen might come home whenever she liked; his order of release was written there in shining letters of ice.")

The Baron de Gunzburg recalled, about Carl, that when the camera was turned on, his face always began to glow and then turned red and yet more and more burning red, until mechanical end of shot: can you imagine any but the most loving woman in the world being mistress to such a man?; and can you then begin to know what "Gertrude" was to him?

How lovingly he wrote a new ending for the Soderberg play—which he'd *wanted* to film since 1920 . . . . I mean he'd always had it in him, this love of her which he finally fully came to realize in this film—himself, then an old man, writing a scene imagining her, dear "Gertrude," *his* age . . . . life having passed her by—herself, in the scene returning a packet of love letters to her lover, him then . . . . Carl Theodore Dreyer having waited so long for her—she in him . . . . having searched with such terror and final mockery among the saints and witches of his frozen imagination before finally finding her—before falling in love, then.

The film *Gertrude* was completed in 1964: and Carl Theodore Dreyer died several years after: at the very last of his life he was still wishing to do "the Christ film" and an adaptation of Euripides' *Medea.*

"In modern or classic form?" asked an interviewer in 1966.

"Classic," he said.

Sergei Eisenstein

Sergei; and with his parents

Билетъ № 8893

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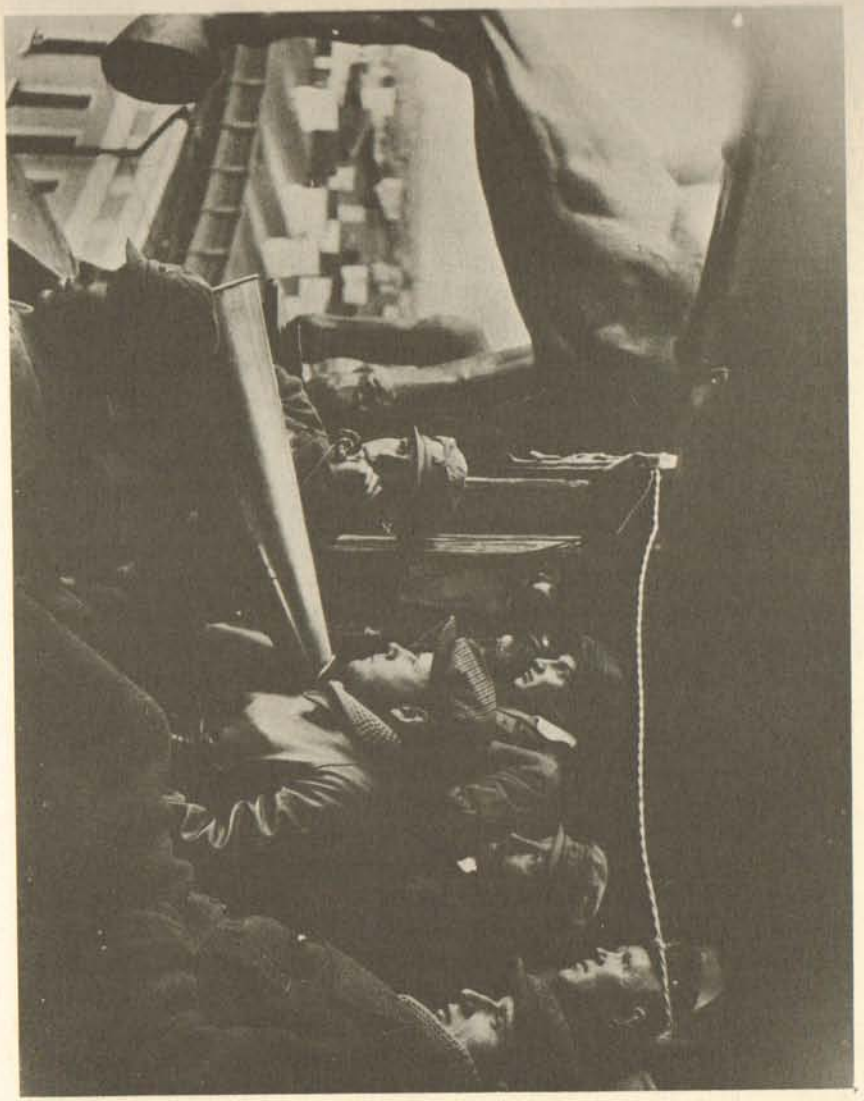
...кой губерніи.

...ціймейстера

E. LEWIN, RIGA.

Childhood

Sergei Eisenstein; and in the US, c. 1930



Production shot from *Ten Days That Shook The World*, 1928

With shaved head, on the set of *Ivan the Terrible*, c. 1944

Set of *Ten Days That Shook the World*, 1928

Some men are caught before their birth by some monstrousness which tears them to pieces of horrible imagination ever after.

Some men are trapped at birth by national or geographic circumstances which re-enact, thus replace, every terror imaginable.

Some men are stopped in all previous tracks by a quirk of event which picks up every foetal and cultural trick-in-the-bag of their pre-birth trauma—an occurrence which acts as a snag in the fabric of their thought . . . . an image even, in their experience—usually very early in their life—which creates a symbol of their birth-neurosis and supersedes any either natural or national symbolism . . . . and it can be something as simple as a story, say—and it can be something as simplistic as a picture or picture book.

I believe it was a picture book which replaced the foetal haunt of Sergei Eisenstein and also damned all societal influences in him from then on.

He was to become a film-maker from some instant—when he turned the page of one picture over to reveal another . . . . from some instant on—when one image replaced another in the flip of a book-image over . . . . from some instant on to another—when a miracle of shifting picture book imagery sent an electrical 'chill' down his child spine. It was a quality of thrilling exposure which must have managed an almost chemical shift in him: something imbalanced in his minutest physiological make-up was 'braced,' forever after, by this instant of tingling spine: I can guess this was what happened because his greatness was of that quality only possible in a man working out of "second nature" as it is called; and I can guess that this instant was inspired by a picture book because of the aesthetic process he created in all his work, both filmic and verbal, from then on.

But my 'guess' is conditioned by some similar pre-birth ghostliness, social disordering, and eventual snag-of-thought in myself, some chain-of-events perhaps utterly different from those I imagine as similar for Sergei; yet my 'guess'—right down to "picture book"—can be verified more than it normally could . . . . *à propos* any other person . . . . because he was an artist: and an art leaves a record of just exactly this—and very little else—just exactly this process of traumatization before, during, and very shortly after being born . . . . and leaves it as naturally as a tree leaves patterns of veins in its leaves—as, naturally, a sea-shell records its growth and attendant hardship in the carves and colors of etched and dyed calcium deposit.

But I don't mean to suggest that a man's creative life can be anything as simply achieved as that of a leaf or sea creature: a man also grows of course, in patterns of veins, and carves his face and flares his emotions in display of colors which eventually 'set'

as, say, "red-neck," "pasty-face," etc.; but he takes no more note of this, moment to moment, than of leaves and shells—nor does he take any eventual account of his surface fabric of wrinkles . . . . the face he's made for himself, his skin textures or self-created-color . . . . as expression-of-self: most men pay more attention to the color each was born with rather than any "subtle" change he's made for himself: the physiology of each man, thus, exists as a dream to him: and it is his mentality which seems to each and every one the prime creative realm: each meets leaf's surface and shell-shape with a weave-of-thought he thinks he's made-up for himself.

This is false!

This fault in Man is exposed as such, and best, in Art!

An art is made as naturally/creatively as a face, a leaf—each form of art as necessary-a-container as a shell . . . . each thing made by a maker as preordained-a-mark as the thrusting tubes of chlorophyll—and as individual-a-thrust as each leaf's necessary measure.

Tree-leaves and leaves-of-books achieve their marks similarly.

Each sea-shell and each shell-of-ear contains the outside musical possibilities inherent from birth—the former, the sea creature, a chamber of, say, calcium carbonate which receives a world of vibrations . . . . vibrations being The World that the bit-of-meat/creature expands and recoils within: whereas Man's ear is meat-pushed-out—the latter a flesh sound-catcher . . . . the bone within this flesh, the drum of expansion and contraction of Man's hearing—in space rather than shape—which exists *as* sound, rather than World lived within, and which, therewith its vibrations, electrifies the brain.

Think of a man with a hollow sea-shell cupped around his ear. Think of him hearing what he calls "the music of the spheres." It is his *flesh* ear—thus his face, his hair, his coloring all over—which he equates with a *dead* sea-shell or dried-out leaf: but the thoughts prompted by his ear-bones prompting brain do seem to him the thing comparable to creatively living Nature in *any,* as he would say, "*man*ifestation."

He would not honor the shape of his ear as anything creatively his: and this disownment of physiology . . . . this shunning of his living surface . . . . creates the net where Darkness *has* him/Man in a catch-of-thought that's often locked before his birth.

Yet, grounded as each man is by pre-ordained-thought, this shunning of his surface-life prompts the need in each and every man, to create a field of surfaces beyond himself. When these are made through the human process called "Art," these surfaces come into being as naturally as any living surface: and they can,

by any man, be recognized as such—for they are either fashioned as shields or, if Art, as illuminations . . . . either as the heraldic banner of The Light or the guiding Light itself, against all of The Dark in him—as such as his skin . . . . and as such as is *of* him, whomever made it: and these surfaces, separate from Man—yet *of* him—move naturally against thought . . . . as naturally as vegetation thrusts against gravity: and The Darkness—whatever that is (and we'll come to it again later)—finds itself defeated a little on its own undergrounds by a fielding of all surface tension . . . . and defeated a lot by this field-in-time which historically we call "Aesthetics."

Aesthetics is a collection of dead sea shells.

It is a leaf press-dried between the leaves of a book.

It is a marker on the grave of thought.

But it can also be seen, childishly, as a picture book.

Let's work back—to this moment of young Sergei looking in a picture book . . . . let's work back to this instant—from something of his he'd made as a grown man: in his first film . . . . *Strike* . . . . he superimposed the furry faces of animals over human features. These actors are 'villains' in *Strike*—strike-breakers in fact—and are introduced by sub-titles as nick-named: "Monkey," "Fox," etc. Such suggested totemism was not particularly original-in-itself nor very spectacular in this film: but the technical steps which arrive-at this effect in Sergei's first motion picture achieve an aesthetic particular to him: first, the villains are referred-to by their animal nick-names: secondly, a pet-shop is introduced so that the faces of the animals and the men may be viewed separately in a natural context: then, third, the faces of men and animals are superimposed. The whole sequence has the effect of (1) 'title,' and (2) comparison-of-image through filmic 'cuts' which are very like turns-of-pages, and finally (3) the combination of man/animal faces as they might occur in-the-mind remembering both simultaneously. There is very little attempt to make the animal face-shape conform to the human. It is an *idée fixe* being expressed.

Something alien as an animal had ravaged personal being in the womb: at his birth, the mouth of The World had opened to swallow him: the teeth and claws of air, then, had raked his body warmth: he was born out of a broken bag of streaming water.

Later, flipping a book leaf would turn a human into an animal before his eyes, or vice-versa, and back again: this image transformation—subject to the will of the young viewer—would absorb the terrified energies of the earlier occurrence . . . . give the childish viewer some seeming grip again, as he'd thought he'd had in the womb, on his destiny being born . . . . and replace it with a process he would fulfill ever after.

And the water?—the out-pouring from the broken bag-of-water at birth? . . . . : the first fast cutting to be found in the work of Sergei Eisenstein is the sequence of streams-of-water from fire hoses, shattering against a mass of people, drowning individuals in its streaks of diagonal whites. Most 'deaths' in the early films of Sergei are by water—the very 'threat of death' signaled dignified moving or rapidly-cut white diagonals . . . . the instant of 'death' signified by a ragged white splash—this latter image evolving, in later work, to smoke and/or dust-puffs, white funeral dress, etc: but Death is always, in his work, diagonally heralded and whitely, explosively, fulfilled.

Have you ever watched a child with a picture book?—seen his sudden excitement expressed in rapid turns of the white lines pages become when flipped? . . . . watched this whir of papers-become-emotion erupt into a fountain of blurring movement?—a splash of book-leaves caught in the shuffle of backward and forward motion?

Sergei met his first living death in a turn of the page: an animal image replaced one of a human—a picture of a child perhaps: Sergei thrashed wildly, then, with pages becoming like wings-in-flight to escape . . . . and he seemed to die, all the same—all the same as before in the womb.

In *The Battleship Potemkin,* his second film, the first fast cutting occurs when a frustrated sailor reads words written around a plate he is drying, then smashes the circle of that plate, in diagonal arm movements, to its broken fragments: but previous to this act, this same sailor is seen in a roomful of swaying diagonal ropes holding hammocks—himself in one, as in a womb . . . . himself hurt then, by a bestial officer—himself crying himself to sleep again. When the leader of the mutiny, the Hero is killed, he falls first into a loom of ropes, then slips from this accidental 'hammock-womb' to the death-splash ending of him.

The whole threat-of-death drama on *The Battleship Potemkin* develops beneath diagonal ship's cannons, reaches climax when a white tarpaulin is thrown over a group of disobedient sailors—like a limp page over a picture—: and they are ordered shot . . . . : the resultant mutiny acts itself out as a series of variations on this original theme—diagonal stair patterns and running sailor legs culminate in bursts of gun-powder white or ocean splash or both . . . . diagonal candlesticks are crushed and piano keys smashed, in even the priest's cabin, delicately echoing this primal scene in an almost Mozartian variation—a miniature, as it were, culminating in pistol explosions.

It all, this enacted rebellion, has the authenticity of 'the real'—moved the world of viewers to believe in the immediacy of its happening—be*cause* it was informed in him/Sergei by events more

remote than dream . . . . events that took place before his birth, before thought, before whatever he thought he knew and could remember . . . . events that later took shape in the life-and-death thrashing of a book caught between his pre-destined hands, his eyes, his mind's eye—his mouth-of-an-eye pre-ordained to swallow The World.

Let us come back to the term "The Dark" as it applies to The Soul of Man, and define it: The Dark, then, is any force which pre-ordains a man. That definition—which will serve us very well in this essay—permits "The Light" to be "Destiny" . . . . as distinct opposite of ordination—opposite, therefore, of both personal order and the order of, say, a nation.

These terms: "The Light" and "The Dark": are traditionally interchangeable in Orthodox Christian Russia with: "God" and "The Devil." The motion picture medium is the first instrumentation which can express this interchangeability directly: and Sergei Eisenstein was the first Russian man to take advantage of that possibility. For *The Battleship Potemkin* he created a devil priest made up of black lines of evil expression on white-of-face, white hair and beard first seen as if streaming hell-fire's smoke—the beastliness of The Priest, his Jehovan hair . . . . the manliness of him, his features struggling to achieve bestial expression—each image a contradiction . . . . a complex of interwoven Destiny and pre-ordination—the apparition of The Priest, a portrait of the very war of Dark and Light which makes his Devil/God image possible on motion picture screen.

Sergei himself acts the part of The Priest of *Potemkin*—covers his face with a make-up beard, thick eye-brows, wig, etc., and plays this character apart from all others: for it is a black priest he creates, yet bearded white . . . . the only ambiguous—therefore 'three-dimensional'—role in the film: oh, The Priest *is* clearly 'villain' as dictated by Communist policy; but he is a jolly 'villain,' a humoresque symbol of God's 'good,' humanly moving—as given a depth-of-characterization by Eisenstein's very features . . . . his rapidly moving, thus 'flashing' eyes, expressively 'pug' nose, ironic/pressed lips, always as if about to laugh-at-self . . . . and the whole charming personality of young Sergei poking winks and smirks and happy self-mockery through the pasted-on hair, the animal-mask, as it were, and/or God's mask, too, over human face—an effect very like some fierce Sun visage breaking through white clouds in a child's illustration.

(Sergei later claimed the part of The Priest in *Potemkin* was played by a local gardener: but he admitted donning The Priest's robes and a fake wig to 'stand in' for The Priest's fall down a flight of steps in the film: even if he only did this 'stunt' shot, that image 'stands' then for the single image of Eisenstein in all his films—that 'fall,' therefore identification-enough for the purposes of this essay . . . . "The idea of performing the stunt was too tempting," he said—Sergei's features and the gardener's, under hair, similar enough to tempt fate itself into portrait.)

The Priest in the film, is Devil—and even actively hinders the movie's 'good' white sailor mutiny; but he is primarily a passive villain, clutching his crucifix and hiding behind his Bible . . . . that "Book of books" as it's called . . . . like a mischievous child caught at play with his toys and fairytale stories, in midst of some adult quarrel utterly beyond him; and, like most children in such circumstance, he is on-the-side of the adults who would have things continue as-they-were—on-the-side of Authority; and he is made peevish enough, by this interruption of his play, this danger to the security of his, say, play-sword/crucifix and his book, to strike-out against the invasion of his 'nursery' by these disruptive young-adults/the-sailors of the Potemkin 'family.'

The Priest is also Beast, as Sergei plays him, because of his beard. The beard is almost always villain, in itself, in the films of Eisenstein—"the sign of the beast" . . . . Sergei's childhood animal enemy—superimposed and growing then on his face. His clear heroes are clean-shaven, or no more than mustached, in his earlier films. The propaganda of The State made Sergei equate 'enemy,' thus 'beard,' with authoritarianism of the old regime: and the heavily-bearded characters Sergei films in, for instance, *The Old and The New* (also called *The General Line*) are always those favoring 'the old' and resisting 'the new.' Even in his last film, *Ivan The Terrible: Part 2,* Sergei takes particular delight in the sequence which depicts Ivan cutting-off the beards of his enemies and ordering that all Russians be beardless: but there is a kind-of-beard which Sergei, in later films, comes to accept—a close-cropped, well-trimmed beard . . . . Lenin's beard. Perhaps his coming-to visual terms with *this* particularity of beard begins in his third film, *Ten Days That Shook The World* (or *October,* as it was originally called): in this film, the hero has-to-be Lenin: but, significantly enough, when Sergei first pictures Lenin, he has him disguised in a wrap-of-bandages concealing, yes!, his beard.

The features of later bearded heroes, Alexander Nevsky and Ivan, would be black: and the actors who played these roles would struggle dramatically to express their whitely human facial emotions in opposition to this stance-of-black, this animal hair, upon them. Both the Christ-like trim of the beard of Alex and the more devilish cut of Ivan's hair operate visually in contrast to each's feature and create the prime visible complexity-of-charac-

ter in what becomes, in "Ivan," a black-and-white, almost musical 'study' of the struggle of good and evil on the facial surface of singular man.

The beard which Sergei finally found acceptable for his latter-day complicated protagonists—this beard of Lenin—is the one European West has most come to accept as that of The Devil . . . . The Devil's beard being for mid-European Christianity the carefully barbered, thus thoughtfully intentioned, one—the cosmetic beard which did not grow, thus, naturally. But Russian Orthodox Christianity was older, closer to the struggle against paganism and all it might represent of Nature, the natural: thus it came to be that only priests above pagan suspicion, and later members of the ruling class, could safely let their hair grow as it naturally did: all others tended to arouse suspicion with unclipped hair. In post-Revolutionary Russia, when The Priests came to be viewed as 'bad,' their traditional beards immediately became their prime visual target-of-criticism—were attacked, as if they were Medusa's coils, by those who hated priests.

As it happened, Sergei did not particularly hate The Priests; but he did hate beards. Neither Orthodoxy nor Communist propaganda moved him, as Artist, to sufficient passion for him to make immortal images of *any* of either Christianity nor Politburo's symbols: but, by luck, his complex personal struggle with hair-as-animality could mesh with Communist cosmetic dictates in this war of styles; and his fascination with The Devil's beard, as possible complexity-of-God, could take its cues from Lenin's taste: it was the same Artist's luck that Medieval painter sensualists had in "The Garden of Eden" which permitted them to depict the nude human body, or that masochist Gruenwald had in having Christ's crucifixion for acceptable subject of gruesome torture, or that Goya had, in excuse of patriotism, for lovingly depicting slaughter.

The only actor's part that Sergei ever played in his films was this one of black priest. In terms of his whole life's individual stance, this role in moving images constitutes a definitive self-portrait, as deeply biographical as any of young Rembrandt—though it is a portrait more like one of Durer's images-of-self . . . . that is, it is a very symbolic self-portrait—tells its story of conflicting personnae, as well as person, via symbolic object as much as facial feature: thus, what may first appear as ambiguity of character, can come to be appreciated as incredible complexity of same . . . . God and The Devil fighting this most particular battle for the soul of Sergei—Sergei in disguise—The Devil in disguise, of Priest—Priest in disguise behind the animality of historical God—God in disguise under a make-up beard. The Priest's acted death occurs

also in this quality of 'ambiguity'—which we can appreciate as personal, self-portrait, 'honesty' . . . . the simple truth that, as Sergei did not die, this priest-self-symbol of him only closes his eyes, one at a time, in obvious sham-of-death—a sham that is so playful as to enact itself as a 'knowing' wink at last image of The Priest: the audience must assume he was thrown overboard with the rest of the authorities: this is never shown.

It is therefore of the nature of a pre-ordained death—having nothing whatever to do with Destiny and/or The Light which all living things are destined to follow: The Devil, or 'Prince of Darkness' has it, thus . . . . this assumption of the death of The Potemkin Priest: but his clutch of crucifix and book, his childish behavior and final wink, were destined from the first—as it was that Sergei should someday play something of some-such thing as this priest can be seen to be . . . . destined that Sergei could make an image of his face, struggling through beard, which would haunt The World—there was such energy, therefrom the turn-of-page, as could move mountains forever after: the trap-of-energy was pre-ordained, pre-birth: the trap was sprung between two pictures in a children's book . . . . his Destiny arranged, as it always is, at energy's release, when Sergei exercised his finger's *will* to move a paper edge from right to left and back again and then—then made energy his . . . . as it was always meant to be—be growth up into The Light of the sun . . . . as any creature's habit of pre-ordained form becomes energy's fashion—seeking infinite possibilities.

We can now dispense with such terms as "Devil" and "God"—for Sergei had very little use or need for them . . . . though he was socially stuck, as every Western man, with these historical terms at start: He turned, in his college studies, to The East to escape this traditionally pre-ordained trap of his imagination: the picture book was the key to this choice also in his living—thus . . . . all East does make its terms from scratch, of images rather than words—its complexities of thought from image-combinations, superimpositions, in the hieroglyphs of its written language.

Let's go back to the book—the picture book . . . . for he was that young then, that the words within it were only images, too, to him: and let us see him as 'child of his Times' then—already trapped at birth by genetics . . . . trapped since birth by codes of behavior in everyone around him, begun in each womb; and let us see him seeing himself—as if colored paper were a mirror . . . . mirror the only other flat-image feed-back he'd ever had: let us see him flat on the page then—with, perhaps, a red and black button coat . . . . against a white land scape, flat with little knolls upon it—*made* curved or three-dimensional, by the slightest push

of his fingers against the surface of the paper—and dark tree trunks . . . . thrusting straight down to the ground, page bottom—tree trunks made to waver and coil diagonally by a sleight-of-hand push against picture-orders of the page: sudden thrust of, say, knuckles, and the image has become . . . . what?—fox in his lair?—wolf tearing at the hide of a deer?—a lion mane in African scene? . . . . no!—something more like a dog or cat upon its hind legs standing upright where, in the other picture, the child had been—some Russian puss-in-boots, then? . . . . no—some more ferocious creature glaring out of an indoor scene—some mythological monster, whatever its whiskered feature! Sergei, later, could not remember any better than I can herein imagine the picture; but he certainly flipped back and forth between images and then desperately rummaged among the word-filled pages in search for the grace of white; and as he man-handled these pre-ordained pages, the lines of print curved and seemed to crawl—letter orders displacing previous letters in a 'movie' of slightly-shifting shapes on white—as if masses of black 'worker' ants were invading a sugar bowl in his hands.

The transformation was complete—Sergei's energy released . . . . his possibilities within this particular *form* become infinite: he had his Destiny from then on.

The Form of transformation became Style in him—*his* style . . . .

And Style in a man is Soul—his soul manifest to others only through his style . . . . his living style . . . . and the frozen etch of the style of everything he makes . . . .

And Soul is simply the source of destined energy—released in the style of the original moment of transformation . . . . a form that *can* become "form of Art" for fullest possible release of energy significant to others.

Nothing else mattered one damn to Sergei from then on: he used all societal damns, inhibitions of human will, to trigger some semblance of the original release—to trigger "some semblance" rather than simply "release" because the original release of his energy *had* occurred be*cause* of semblances . . . . : thus he became a visual Artist: and the medium of motion pictures was to him, naturally, as if made for him.

Long before he ever knew of the existence of movies he was being prepared for them. Within days or weeks of the original transformation, his destiny was surely working itself through events of his daily life—making eventuality of it . . . . thus:

Shoe laces went one over the other—and then one under . . . . and then through each other, folded together—and pulled apart to gather or come asunder, any-which-way other than was an order:

The books had letters as well as pictures: and he was making the letters be in his mind as creatures—along a line, as martialed people . . . . one over the other—twisting together . . . . to gather—together:

Before he could talk he came to hate the face of the moon . . . . to love the sun . . . . to hate the sun—to want to turn it off and on . . . . to turn the picture page of the sun upon—what? . . . . shoe laces . . . . letters . . . . whatever . . . . what forever was crisis in him—prompting the original crisis in the womb and the exact measures, the formal style, of his deliverance therefrom.

Thus he became the first film artist to believe-in totem worship—to create a dance of animal identification around the fire of movie screen: and to release this fearful energy, he created fast-cutting, the rapid replacement of one static image with another . . . . a flip-book aesthetics that came, even when 'slowed,' to be called "Film Montage"—a term almost synonymous with his name.

By means of rapid, even 'jump,' cutting—and by intercutting for association-of-image—he made animal totem polarities of human agony which have haunted The World ever since . . . . the stone lion in *Potemkin* . . . . the dead horse as the failing spirit of 'the people' in *Ten Days That Shook The World*—this image, also derived of sculptured statue in previous shots, fallen limp as flesh . . . . its white mane replacing the black hair of a dead woman . . . . its body dangling from a draw-bridge rising, in a series of almost symphonically visualized criss-cross lines, to a singular diagonal—from which the body of the horse drops, finally, to watery death.

None of the things one writes about can possibly account for the haunting power of this series of shots: it is an energy beyond memory which informs it: it is the formal integrity of a man haunted by a turn-of-the-page which energizes it.

The 'Odessa Steps sequence' from *Potemkin* is a masterpiece of steps become pages of a book spilling martialed letters, their diagonals, out of itself—spelling Death to all irregular laces of masses as have, in its previous sequence, straggled down to the docks . . . . the rope-like lines of people, who move among white rectangular buildings throughout the films of Eisenstein: as these coils of humans are 'undone' by militant lines of soldiers—all of a type—they begin to be revealed, by Sergei, as individuals facing Death . . . . their white faces to be shattered by black streams of their blood: they move *en masse:* as veins on a hand: they are scattered by militant precision in a flurry of diagonals: they die, each one, as a monster—some mythological monster . . . . created of blood broken loose from all destined form.

Only, finally, in *Ivan The Terrible* does this ant-mass of humanity achieve a triumphant means to its ends, as Sergei envisioned them; and then, in this last film of his—his testament—the line-of-people forms its as-if-hieroglyph across an expanse of snow . . . . the people come to plead with Ivan to be their king again. In this perhaps most haunting scene of all Eisenstein, Ivan finally raises his head so that the coil of people beyond his window seems to trickle off the end of his pointed beard. It took Sergei a lifetime of shuffling motion picture diagonals and fussing with animal hair, to achieve this immortally moving black-on-white stencil of himself's/Ivan's physical and cosmic alignment with a glyph of the people—whose hierarchy included veins, ropes, shoe-laces, lettered enigmas, *etcetera* . . . . a hieroglyph begun before he was born.

Government dictate would not permit Sergei to show, in his second film, that the mutinous sailors of *The Battleship Potemkin* were forced to scuttle their ship, seek Sanctuary in foreign lands, to save themselves from being shot—anymore than Stalin's dictatorship would permit him to show *Ivan The Terrible: Part 2* or make the "Part 3" he'd intended . . . . wherein Ivan, in a monastery, was to confront God: but these censorships could not for an instant stop him from making the complete art of the picture-book trauma again and again, using whatever means of plot the censors forced upon him—whatever the locale of the photography or actors permitted him . . . . could not stop him from developing this primal scene, film to film, for fullest exposition of his most personal vision . . . . could not stop this growth of Art in him until they stopped him from filming at all and eventually killed him—'broke' his heart, called "heart attack," a few months after *Ivan The Terrible: Part 2,* and all hope of filming "Part 3," was taken away from him.

His fourth film, *The Old and The New,* and his fifth, *Alexander Nevsky,* were both closely watched and actively supervised by government censors during production: the former was 'assigned' to Eisenstein—was expected to be a propaganda film extolling the virtues of 'the collective farm' . . . . was governmentally intended, primarily, for peasant farmers—was therefore an assignment expected to discipline Sergei himself, from . . . . as a Communist bureaucrat might have put it . . . . "all such artiness and high-falutin' fastcuts and stuff-and-nonsense" as he, Sergei, had created in his previous films—: *The Old and The New* had to be very simple and stupidly straight forward: I'm sure that those who assigned it to him, then known by them as 'the big city'/'world famous' film-maker, thought of the assignment as a means to bring him "down to earth," as they might have put it: it was mid-1920s, the beginning of the era of 'cutting down' any such individualism as had surfaced in Russia immediately after The Revolution—an era that was to end in a 'purge' more terrible than war or hunger had effected . . . . a bureaucratic purge which would cut many men down to six feet under the earth in unmarked graves of Siberia, for the slightest—often imagined—offense against bureaucracy . . . . bureaucracy moving—as it always does—to create its safety in Fascism.

Despite supervision by these dangerous office-workers lording it over him, Sergei managed to attack 'the bureaucratic' directly in *The Old and The New:* he has a scene where the peasant protagonists, begging for a tractor to save the community harvest, are given the usual evasive treatment of 'the bureau' by superior-acting 'white-collar'workers too busy to see them, etc.—until one of the farmers pounds his fist on a desk and demands the tractor in the name of "Lenin" . . . . a name which, in this film, produces a tractor immediately—as magically as Aladdin's lamp.

The implications were clear: the man, Eisenstein, had gone-to-war against the office worker—a war he was certain to lose, in Russia as anywhere else . . . . a war no individual can win in his lifetime—outnumbered as any individual is, however popular his cause, by this white-collar corps, this largest collective with narrowest objective in the history of the world.

The Artist, Sergei within him, could and did easily win again and again: when they sent him 'to the farm' to humiliate him, he absorbed the world of the farmer into the light of his most personal vision—immediately shifted his dramatic necessities to the accommodations of folk-tale . . . . "Lenin" the magic word to work miracles . . . . a mechanical cream-separator or tractor the talisman to defeat all evil—and he even used broad peasant humor, the form of 'the dirty joke,' to develop his/Sergei's totemism further . . . . dressing the cow for the mating with community's new bull as a bride, complete with veil and crown of flowers, etc. . . . . intercutting bull's head, and cow's, with the laughing and weathered faces of farmers, wives, boys, girls, and happy children playing 'marriage': the whole-of-the-film could not be Art—it was too 'sat-on' by censorial office-workers . . . . too loaded with the paper notions of propaganda; but Sergei did manage sequences as magical as anything else in his work—thus endangered himself . . . . not from these sequences—which 'passed' the censors as 'showy' but otherwise 'harmless' tricks-of-his—but from some sense of growing power this growth of art-in-him gave the man/Eisenstein at this difficult Russian Time, when Communism shifted itself into the gears of total dictatorship.

Sergei failed to conform to 'The Party Line' as his imaginary farmers had done; and he might actually have been killed in the Politburo 'purges' of the 1930s, had he not left Russia for a world tour which was, also, to end in a series of failures-to-conform—failures to find any kind-of-an Artist's home . . . . to complete any film and/or escape the confines of censorship. He did, surely, take this trip in hopes his international reputation would succeed for him better elsewhere than in Russia: it didn't: and his worldly self thus prevented The Artist in him from completing a single sequentially moving image for almost ten years.

He began a film called *Romance Sentimentale,* which was commissioned by a famous opera singer exile of old Russia, and was to be a portrait of her and of—as he envisioned it—that condition of nostalgic living she was having. It begins with a thrashing to tree-trunk diagonals, blackly moving lines against the white 'page' of the sky, all intercut with the rush of sea-surf and its 'explosions' of white, in thematic answer to cut trees falling down: but when it came to images of the woman in her living room, sitting at her piano, singing songs *in memoriam* of old Russia, he could not bring himself to complete the film—left it to his companion photographer, Edward Tissé, and script-writer, Grigori Alexandrov, to fulfill the demands of the commission . . . . to give it a happy, show-biz ending in singing and singing—this first sound film he'd ever attempted thus ending as musical comedy.

He failed in Hollywood, naturally, too—script after script rejected . . . . month after month wasted—without a chance to even begin filming.

He failed in Mexico, after months of filming what was to be called *Que Viva Mexico* under commission by Upton Sinclair—one of the so-called "cocktail communists" of American 'thirties' . . . . these men, living in the hellish contradiction of being wealthy proletarians,—rich 'poor folk' . . . . or somesuch—thus hack Idealists . . . . these men, then, proving more destructive to any possible art or, even, human understanding than the worst materialist business man the dishonest commerce had ever created—Sinclair finally taking all Sergei's Mexican footage away from him and selling it piecemeal to "Castle Films," etc., for travelogue movies.

Everywhere Eisenstein went he was 'the toast of the town,' was praised, was 'wined-and-dined,' was promised almost anything by any and everyone in fashion—his ego pumped and puffed-up beyond any previous recognition: but the artist-in-him was permitted nothing in midst of this fame . . . . thrashed hopelessly amidst his worldly 'favor,' midst broken promises, fits-and-starts at film-making—managing only fragments of aesthetic haunts . . . . such as Mexicans in hammocks streaked by rippling diagonal

shadows . . . . heads of native martyrs stomped-to-death under horse hooves in 'splashes' of dust . . . . totemism through animal and monster masks among candied skulls and other symbols of Death-worship in Spanish festival . . . . etc.—fragments, finally edited into fragmentary completion by Marie Seaton and others, years later.

Finally Sergei Eisenstein returned to Russia. Kenneth Rexroth tells the story of a conversation with Eisenstein, shortly before his departure from America, wherein he/Sergei admits he's being forced back to The Soviet Union—reportedly says that 'they' "have something *on* him"/his "homosexuality" . . . . that 'they' had threatened to "expose" him: "Let them," said Rexroth: "Oh, no!" he replied: "It would kill my mother."

He failed at his first attempted film again in Russia: *Bezhin Meadow:* and had it taken away from him. He seemed trapped at every move he made, each movie he attempted to make, each script of his which censors refused to accept: he was too famous to squeak-through any cracks of Politburo inattention. Finally, in 1938, on the eve of Russian war with Germany, he was permitted to complete his fifth film: *Alexander Nevsky:*—thought-of, propagandistically, as an historical "review" so to speak of the defeat of German Knights by Russian heroics . . . . a kind-of musical-comedy warning to Hitler—and an operatic 'pep-talk' to the Russian people. Sergei was, naturally, supervised more closely than ever while making this film—a censor continually 'at his sleeve' during all photography . . . . looking 'over his shoulder' each editing instant: again, no total work-of-art was possible: but he did manage some sequences-of-images sufficiently in his personal tradition to accomplish immortally haunting pictures—that which is all, of him or any man, which can honestly be called "Art" . . . . sufficient to the desperate needs of the/his person to haunt all other persons—remind them of their, however other, ghosts in the matter of becoming individual living creature.

In *Alexander Nevsky,* children are thrown into the fire, disappear into a puff of smoke: Teutonic Knights are masked as beasts and totemed with the horses they nightmarishly ride upon; and they are—as absolutely horizontal lines of black on snow and ice white, finally 'defeated' by being linearly broken up . . . . in the greatest thrash of heroic diagonals yet achieved by Sergei . . . . and destroyed, horse/man, men-limbs/hooves, masks and all, a piece at a time, through black cracks in rapidly-cut ice-breaks, to watery death—The Artist Sergei at desperately happy work again!

His theoretical writings at this time defended every aesthetic stance he took in absolute confirmation of his bookish haunt: each

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use by him of letters was a word-by-word thrash of language against itself, 'fighting fire with fire'—every sentence as if made to sentence language to obliteration by image . . . . to make every verb an actually moving hierarch—every noun a glyph of thing. For instance, he graphed his aesthetic statements as if he were writing film-scripts; and he was quick, whenever possible, to make linguistic assumptions which compacted all flow-of-language into blocks-of-sense, as if sentences and individual words were no more finally useful than as sign-posts.

He even graphed Sergei Prokofiev's music score to stand-for the line of Knights in the image it accompanies—assuming the viewer would 'read' the line of soldiers, right to left . . . . making Prokofiev's eighth note marks occur exactly—assuming average speed of reading—where Teutonic flags occur in the line of, thus, 'type.' Eisenstein's entire interest in sound was, in theoretical fact, the effect it might have upon directing attention to the desired 'reading' of image . . . . that a musical beat, for instance, co-inciding with a particular movement, could fix attention on one or another area of composition specifically—just as dialogue could replace sub-titles, thus literature, altogether. These two Sergei's, working closely together, appropriated the signatures of music and forced them to illustrate images very much as images had traditionally illustrated text.

Working along lines of operatic thought and ballet aesthetics, Eisenstein and Prokofiev attempted sound-and-image combinations akin to Song and Dance at Classical best. They worked closer-than-ever together on Eisenstein's next film: *Ivan The Terrible,* making all music essentially accompaniment-of-image in Tchaikovskian tradition—as purely illustrative as all words, in *Ivan,* finally are . . . . all dialogue utterly dramatic in the Eastern Theatrical tradition—as *un*literary as a Western man could make it.

Although Eisenstein was an actively passionate Reader—exhaustively studying whatever literature or even newspaper that came his way, his whole lifelong—he was subconsciously, and therefore *most* naturally, against The World of Letters as such, as he'd inherited it . . . . thus was aesthetically up-against the cultural fact that "movies" in Russia are called "Kine," a word derived from The Greek meaning "writer of movement": he did everything in his power to alter that sense of it—Pudovkin's sense of it . . . . Vsevolod Pudovkin his life-long friendly-enemy . . . . Pudovkin the film-maker he forever argued-with . . . . the Pudovkin he beat at Chess once, to win the 'right'—the 'stakes' of that game—to cast him in the role of "The Anarchist," the emotionalist in rags and chains, in *Ivan The Terrible.*

Parts 1 and *2* of this last work of Sergei constitute the most perfectly realized *un*finished film in the history of Motion Pictures. The success of *Alexander Nevsky,* in the eyes of Stalin, permitted Sergei the greatest freedom he or any film-maker in Russia had ever had in the act of making: censorship was to come later at Stalin's displeasure with, particularly, the ending of *Part 2*—which suggests the corruption that complete power . . . . whether Ivan's or Eisenstein's or Stalin's . . . . effects in the individual man—Ivan seen, at end of this second part, in a dictatorial control of Russia accomplished through a series of brutal murders.

I do not think Sergei imagined for an instant that Stalin would take *Ivan* 'personally': for Sergei was completely absorbed in himself confronting a beast in a children's picture book; and—like all artists—he was utterly naive . . . . when at-work . . . . as to the effect *his* beast might have upon the beastliness of others—though he had been warned of the danger he was running along paths of *Ivan:* his script-writer, Alexandrov, finally said he would have nothing to do with the project: and his cameraman, Tissé, abandoned him in midst of making *Part 2.*

It had been assumed . . . . and he must have assumed it, too . . . . that these life-long companions were essential to his work: but their refusal to complete *Ivan* with him destroyed this myth—the myth of 'collaborative Art' . . . . that an art can, or ever does, come from more than one man: for *Ivan The Terrible* is clearly, with and without Tissé, all of-a-piece and absolutely Sergei's greatest film.

Each movement within its every composition is perfectly realized Ballet. Each composition is an structured as Architecture, each stroke of light as controlled as if it were created in oil paint or fashioned as the reflective surface of mosaic. Everytime anyone or thing moves in *Ivan,* he, she or it shifts to a new compositional stance in relation to everything else in the frame, including the minutiae of distant landscape and/or the carve of architecture, the curves of its arches seen-from-within, and the compositions of murals on the walls surrounding The King in his palaces, churches, etc., and the conspirators against him, hemming him/them in, as if these nets of paint on the walls behind each court action were traps—or Death itself—for any living creature . . . . either Ivan or his enemies . . . . moving in a foreground of enclosing illustration—as if every human action were a desperate dance-of-Life between two positions of 'full-stop' in a painted composition . . . . the whole film moving inexorably under the influence of its fatal backgrounds—as if each human gesture were a shift of mosaic or a fragment of shape seeking freedom from some frozen ordination in a picture-book—seeking each his Destiny through

dramatic moment and emotional speech—each contradicting at every word and turn the "tapestry" of background hemming him in.

But *Ivan The Terrible* is essentially a work of Resignation—Sergei becoming like the 'Ivan' he imagines . . . . resigned, increasingly to the 'pre-ordained'—at the same time he celebrates Destiny-as-movement . . . . each sign-of-life in this film the most beautifully choreographed triumph of Sergei's will imaginable—Ivan's every gesture memorable for all Time. Motion herein is almost always emotional: yet his human actors are as thoughtfully moved, from stance to yet more static stance, as if they were psychological 'weights' of point-counter-point in a game of intellect. The two prime worldly traditions informing middle-aged Sergei for this work were The Chinese Opera and Chess: but his Artist inspiration was as always picture and page—though he'd learned to turn his images slowly . . . . thoughtfully . . . . in his still desperate mind, and to feel each move with the care of an experienced man—stepping, now, slowly along his difficult way.

Fast-cutting, Sergei's main rhythmic means, is at a minimum in this last work: and Vision in *Ivan* is a slow evolution rather than, as earlier, a mutant leap-of-imagination.

Youthfully, it, all Art, had been for him rapidly-cut lines on white—

curves of lines making shape . . . .

shapes 'filled-in' with shades of gray and black and white . . . .

White turning over and over—faster and faster—24 frames-per-second—as he turned the sun . . . . in his imagination . . . . on and off—these the means of young Sergei's eye chewing away at The World.

The means of *Ivan's* make-up are essentially a reverse of all earlier procedure: this last work seeks Black and the monumentality of solid shape—most sequences constructed slowly *out* of some activity of introductory White:

many sequences begin outdoors in snow scenes—

black dots of moving humanity upon them . . . .

and move to interior darknesses—

white spots of candle-light within them . . . .

In one 'telling' sequence of the film, a huge book, The Bible, is laid over the face of Ivan seemingly near Death: but like The Priest of *Potemkin,* he is only faking his death to fool the conspirators of his court: the actor playing Ivan then opens his eye and visually echoes, with his look, the exact expression of Sergei, playing Priest two decades earlier: elder Eisenstein thus had his "Ivan" accept what young Sergei, as Priest, could not.

Ivan moves through the light of this film along a line of rejections-of-Death—his mother's . . . . which makes him child-King—his beloved's . . . . which frees him from personal life to assume full powers of Kingship—to acceptance-of-Death . . . . through Murder—himself as Death: *Part 3* would surely have found him/Sergei, and Ivan, coming to terms with his own death at last.

The 'turning point' in Sergei's life, which makes such eventual acceptance possible to him, and his Art of *Ivan,* occurred when he made his third film: *Ten Days That Shook The World.* This film, made late-1920s, was after all the last work Sergei was permitted to create, very much as he wanted, *and complete.*

It is true that the government censored him here too, somewhat—cut his sequences of Trotsky from it, of course . . . . altered historical fact, thus, to suit the purposes of current propaganda; but they left him *essentially* free—free enough to develop his style as never before . . . . and as, ever after, only in the two-thirds of *Ivan The Terrible* he was allowed before the ultimate censorship, his death, interrupted all work.

Ivan's Part 2 was banned, rather than altered—smuggled, later, out of Kremlin vaults through East Germany . . . . finally released 'officially'—after Stalin's death—exactly as Sergei had made it: thus, this total ban on the work ironically saved it from censors' cuts and preserved it as the only film of Eisenstein we've inherited unaltered by The Politburo: but *Ten Days That Shook The World* is a 'close second' in this respect, and exists as his least-supervised finished film.

It may seem odd that as politically 'touchy'-a-subject as The October Revolution should have emerged least censored of all Sergei's films: but it must be remembered that Eisenstein was a dedicated Communist Revolutionary—a student fighter during the final up-rising . . . . completely inspired by the events he depicts in his film of that historical moment when Kerensky's government was overthrown. For once in his life, the artist-in-him and the revolutionary man were in accord with each other and both in accordance with official policy: thus *Ten Days That Shook The World* occurs as completed Art because of one of those rare miracles of co-incidence of creative person and politics in agreement—that same miracle which produced The Renaissance, Elizabethan Theatre, Irish Abbey, etc. . . . . a co-incidence which is rare as heaven-on-earth—is yet the only means whereby the art of living men may enter 'the public domain.'

Sergei gave *Ten Days That Shook The World* immortality thus:

any picture-book picture, within it, can combine with any other, or others, to make a replacement for *sound*—as when the

'still' image of a soldier and the 'still' of his machine-gun are rapidly intercut to produce the effect of the sound of firing . . . .

and visual sound-effects, thus, become replacements for *words*—as when a harp, being strummed, is superimposed over a speaker's face . . . . the speaker about-to-be interrupted by stomping feet:

therefore images make sentences, thus:

movements, within the frame, replace verbs:

therefore:

pictures of objects replace nouns:

and:

each act of editing, itself, becomes utterly prepositional.

'Still' images, cut together, create contexts—complexes of thought . . . . ideas—for instance:

the objects of the imperial office which Kerensky inherits, beginning with dolls and primitive masks, proceeding to tiny statues of Napoleon, and culminating in symbols of king's crown, chess-pieces, etc., spell-out a statement of historical philosophy . . . . :

whereas:

moving images, edited in juxtaposition, cast spells of mood—make one long visual verb . . . . a choreograph—thus: the peacock-statue on the imperial office door becomes a creature of the assumption-of-power in its spread-of-tail . . . . the act of boasting which Pride engenders; and it becomes symbol of Pride and power-noun again only when 'still'—prideful.

All visual-verbs move as if to become conceptual nouns . . . . as Sergei cuts them—thus: in the sequence of the Russian dance which unites The Communists and The Cossacks, faster and faster cutting gradually obliterates the movements of dancing and makes of them The Dance . . . . obliterates the gestures of humans uniting and spells, of their swiftly-cut and thus superimposed figures, a singular sense—Unification.

Perhaps Sergei thought he was making a grammar for Film: he had, he said, worn-out a print of DWGriffith's *Intolerance,* looking at it hundreds of times before making *Ten Days That Shook The World:* but what he actually achieved was some complete opposite of written grammatical intention as we experience it in writing. Griffith, film's main grammarian, would have found Sergei hopelessly barbaric: and he was!—as barbaric as a child . . . . : and he did create his orders-of-image very like those first humans who tried to substitute a picture for a grunt, a track of lines as an approximate of some spoken meaning, a map of signs to stand (*not* at first for places, things, or persons) but for the sounds of, say, some chief's intentions—the map of the 'list' of the things he'd want from his wars and travels . . . . his thoughts about the history

of himself as collector of possessions—his map for afterlife, a signature of desires accomplished. These "inventories' were the earliest records in the history of Man—records of sounds . . . . wishful groans—grunts of satisfaction . . . . and finally then, the picturization of Humanity howling: "I want . . . . I want"—and the imagelists which signify: "Mine!" . . . . King's—as Artist's—immortality only possible through these symbols which seem to stand-for all that can't actually be kept.

The Revolution was over—just another turn-of-the-wheel—and moving toward eventual Stalinism . . . . already in 1928 . . . . when Sergei Eisenstein celebrated it—making it triumph as only it could in his images . . . . triumph over its own historical Death—its own October . . . . triumph as it had for the period of "Ten Days" that Sergei saw in such a way they would shake The World a little longer than revolution.

He saw them, these "Ten Days," in the most primitive terms known to Man—the metaphors of Dream; and he created this dream of revolution according to the most primitive processes of imagination . . . . the dream process which makes of anything the many-somethings which are finally no-one-thing—or, at least, nothing finally intelligible to the waking man and/or all his systems of thought and orders of communication. The Dream Process is personal: it begins in the womb before other human being, even twin, is so-much as dreamt-of; and it grows only in accordance with the closed-system of 'the sleeper,' even when he is 'daydreaming;' and it feeds on events of the waking world as if they were all only the results of imagination.

Sergei wrote many texts attempting to create communication-systems of the image-orders in his films, most especially of those in *Ten Days That Shook The World:* and in this contextual writing he *is* grammarian. He *had* thought he was creating a communal language when making each film; and he was, as surely as a cause can be said to have an effect, doing such as he thought . . . . but only *be*cause the world of viewers, and readers, too, insisted upon some-such thing out of him: the truth is: *Ten Days That Shook The World* can only be fully appreciated as a dream—a most particular dream, dreamed by some unintelligible other human being in a womb of his own imagination.

He had the Greek Dramatic ideal—or was it the idea of the Politburo?—to avoid any images of violence depicting The Revolution . . . . a dreamy Revolution to be sure—all Death a suggestion . . . . a nightmare's threat—utterly abstract. All the explosive violence at the end of the film is essentially directed against property. The wounded soldier, seen gesturing his comrades on as he is dying, is too picturesque to be taken as seriously hurt. The end

of this dream-impulse, as far as we are permitted to experience it, occurs when 20 years later, *Ivan* celebrates brutal Murder—Ivan's 'feast of celebration' being the only scene of color afforded Eisenstein . . . . blood-reds of dancers amidst the gold of his splendor—the colors as garish as, and of the symbolic orders of, remembered Dream: and Ivan says as his last words in the film, that he/Russia will go on and, as necessary, go on killing . . . . as he and his guests eat the food of slaughter—some of it served in dishes shaped like animals . . . . drinking wine as if it were the very blood of the victim—as totemic-a-scene as ever to-be-found in any jungle.

For twenty years Sergei moved through images that were—in his early films—like those a dreamer remembers on waking . . . . images censored by personal conscious thought—ordered by grammatical attempt—and thus abstract: toward the last of his life he came—in *Ivan*—upon the 'dream-stuff' itself . . . . the primordial urgencies previous to intellect . . . . the primitive King any child is in the womb and for many years after being born—the very raging monster historical 'Ivan' was born-to-be, 'at-large' as adult human: and Sergei used all his thoughtfulness—in making the film *Ivan*—as a tool—outside the work—as a camera . . . . etc.—to simply present him . . . . a walking nightmare of being human—being then, Sergei, too, as he had before memory been . . . . a killer beast—defending himself—against any and all . . . . in his imagination . . . . that might keep him from whatever he might want—might want to be!

It was a heart attack which killed Sergei Eisenstein in 1948. I like to think it was his own—and not some part of 'the doctor plots' of those post-war Stalin purges . . . . : I like to think he made it, this last struggle with the beast within—his physiology hemming-in Dream, as it had from the beginning—himself . . . . exactly as he would have finally wanted it—all thought caught-up in the beat, and at one with the struggling measures of his physical being.

The Brakhage Lectures

Stan Brakhage gave these lectures as a credit course at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago during the fall and early winter of 1970–71. Forty-three films by Méliès, Griffith, Dreyer, Eisenstein, Cocteau and Edwin Porter (which are listed following) were shown in concert with the talks.

Gathering such lectures into bookform is one kind of act of presentation. And preservation. But it cannot really substitute for hearing-and-seeing, no matter how keen the mind's-eye or neutral the memory. Brakhage's introspective views leave one quite stranded if one attempts to adopt them as one's own. Faced immediately by the films themselves, you are forced to your own judgments and toward your own personal vision, spurred, in a sense, by Brakhage's words.

There doesn't appear to be, then, any 'lieu-of' for viewing the films of these four men, but the purely verbal aspects of Brakhage's lectures do convey an artist's insight into art and the ticking of artists' minds. We, at the School, affirm the pleasure of seeing these films with him and, the excitement of hearing his insights. Memorable, all-together.

IAN ROBERTSON

Films shown as part of this lecture-course (by meeting, and in order of screening):

(1) Georges Méliès: *The Ballet Master's Dream, The Magical Kingdom of Fairyland, The Witch's Revenge, The Inn Where No Man Rests, The Infernal Cauldron, The Damnation of Faust, Jupiter's Thunderbolt, The Mermaid, The Magic Lantern, Extraordinary Illusions, The Enchanted Well, The Apparition*

(2) Méliès; *The Bob Kick, The Delphic Oracle, The Art Lesson, A trip to the Moon, The Conquest of the North Pole, Paris to Monte Carlo* (handcolored version), *Baron Munchausen's Dream;* Jean Cocteau: *Blood of a Poet*

(3) Méliès: an untitled film (handcolored), *An Astronomer's Dream* (handcolored), *A Trip to the Moon* (an earlier, handcolored version), *Topsy's Dream of Toyland, A Christmas Miracle;* Anonymous (School of Méliès): *Transformation*

(4) David Wark Griffith: *The New York Hat, The Lonedale Operator, The Battle of Elderbush Gap, Judith of Bethulia*

(5) Edwin Porter: *The Great Train Robbery* (colored version), Griffith: *A Corner in Wheat, The Three Sisters;* Edwin Porter: *Rescued from the Eagle's Nest*

(6) Griffith: *The Birth of a Nation*

(7), (8) Griffith: *Intolerance*

(9) Carl Theodore Dreyer: *The Passion of Joan of Arc*

(10) Dreyer: *Day of Wrath*

(11) Dreyer: *Vampyr*

(12) Dreyer: *Gertrude*

(13) Sergei Eisenstein: *The Battleship Potemkin*

(14) Eisenstein: *Ten Days that Shook the World*

(15) Eisenstein: *Ivan the Terrible, Part 1*

(16) Eisenstein: *Ivan the Terrible, Part 2*

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The Brakhage Lectures

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